

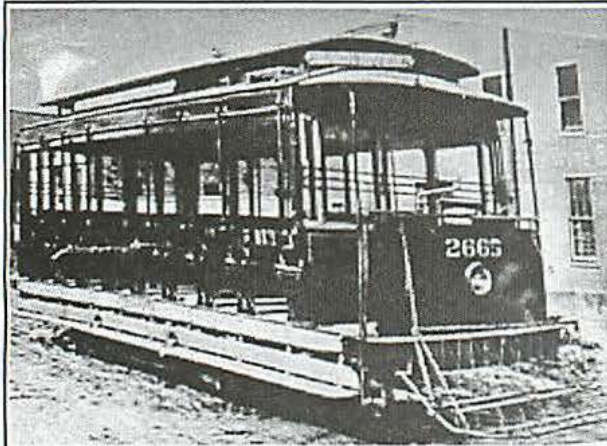
Memories of 'OLD' MIDDLE RIVER



*A loving look back
at the town and its people*

By Jackie Nickel

nickelforyourmemories.com



The streetcar that transported passengers in the early 1900s

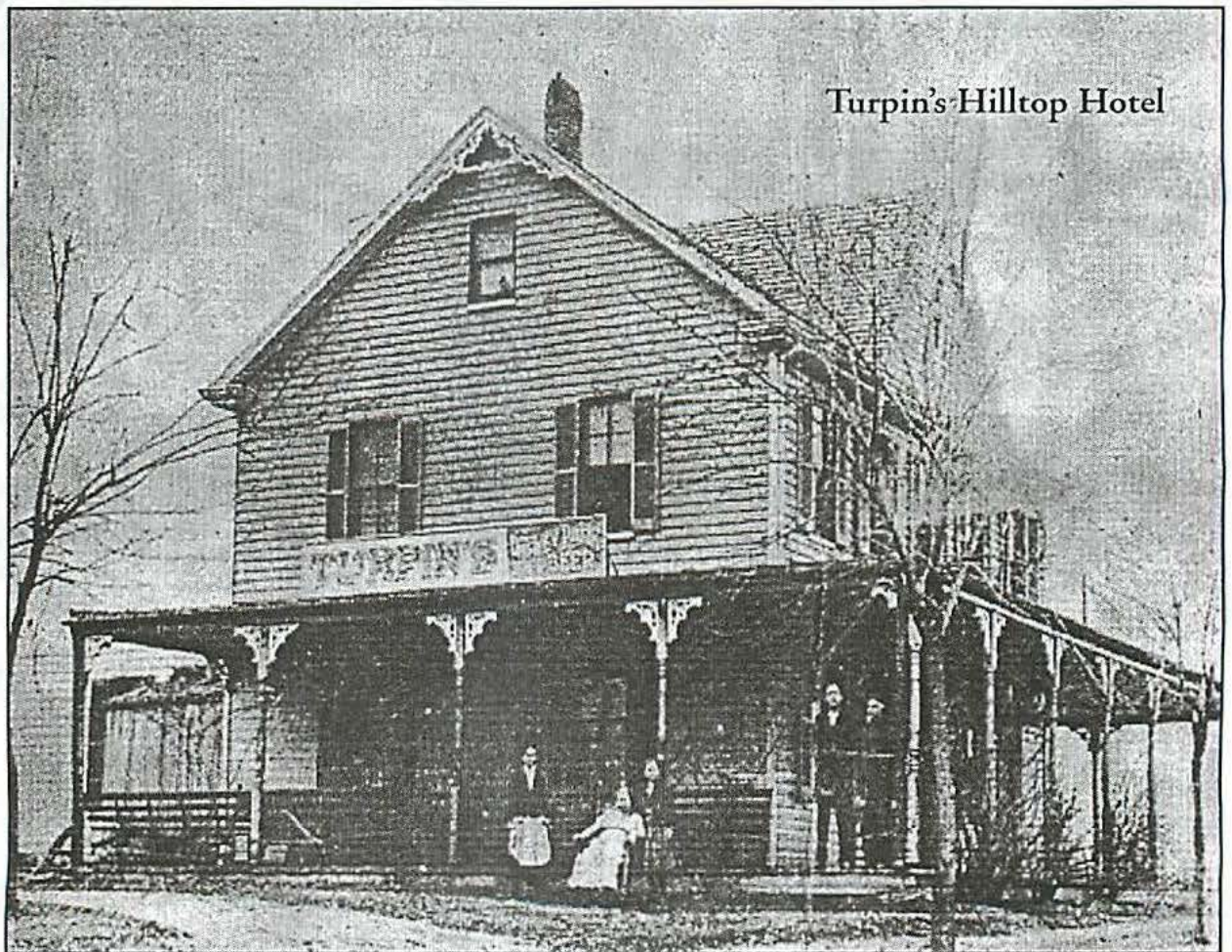
Courtesy Heritage Society of Essex and Middle River

The "original" Middle River Bridge



Heading out from Middle River Bridge to open waters in the 1920s

Courtesy Baltimore County Public Library



Turpin's Hilltop Hotel

Destination: Middle River

In the early 1900s, years before marketing consultants, marina studies and development incentives, Essex-Middle River was a destination for waterfront recreation. Its recent publicity as the shoreline showplace of the 21st century is merely history repeating itself. To visualize the unfolding results of revitalization is to recall the days when Essex was known as “the rising suburb of the east” with Middle River as its shining star.

Picture the area before the construction of Eastern Blvd. All traffic — pedestrian, horse and buggy and Model T's — were forced to travel Eastern Avenue, now known as Old Eastern. The road split at Middle River Bridge, a portion cutting straight across what is now the boulevard to a dead end at the railroad tracks. This route was known as Old Eastern. The other portion, Eastern Ave., led across the bridge, which at the time was on an angle farther out in the creek, next to the old ice house.

The two-lane road was bordered on one side by trolley tracks which ended at the bridge. The trolley could be steered from either end with the switch of a mechanism; it received power from an electric wire above. Open trolley cars carried hundreds of city folks to small hotels and shore homes near and along the riverbank weekly from June through September. Refreshment stands greeted disembarking passengers who were excited by the resort atmosphere.

Some headed to Dick Turpin's Hilltop Hotel situated on a small hill within the current Eastern-Old Eastern triangle in front of what is now the 7-Eleven. The hotel had a bawdy-

house reputation but was said to serve fine soft crab sandwiches for just a few nickels. For those who bypassed the hotels and chose “shore shack” living, the rent was as low as \$5 per week or \$100 per year.

Across the road from the Hilltop was another hotel and dining establishment, this one owned by the Holznecht family. They later built the first ice manufacturing plant in the eastern part of the county, housed in a building that still stands today.

Folks visiting the shore could purchase keg beer at Josenhans general store, buy groceries at Voosen's, or stock up on ice at Holznecht's. In the winter, ice house workers would chop ice from the river and pull it up to the building, selling it in huge blocks, old-timers recall.

Vacationers flocked to the shores each Friday. Then on Sunday evenings, folks heading back to the city would slow traffic to a crawl. “The end of the car line at Middle River Bridge was packed on Sunday nights as darkness came, with folks returning to their city homes,” wrote Fred Heise in a booklet of memories compiled by the Heritage Society of Essex and Middle River in 1994.

After the great hurricane of 1933 wiped out the tracks, trolleys along Eastern Ave. were replaced by buses. The boulevard, however, was not built until 1942.

At Middle River Bridge, the river was wide and deep in the early part of the 20th century and vacationers rented boats for fishing and crabbing. It was even possible to swim under the

bridge up into the area that later became Riverdale.

Paul Vleck is one of those who remembers swimming on north side of bridge in the late 1930s-early 40s. "It was so deep you couldn't touch bottom," he says.

Barges hauling oyster shells to be used for road paving came up the waterway to deposit material at a point of land between what is now Riley's Marina and Cutter Yacht Basin. "We used to call it the oyster pile," relates Annabelle Punte Vleck, Paul's wife of almost 55 years.

The waterway was narrow at the bridge even in those days, so much so that the oyster barges had to go under the bridge to turn around in the wider portion, past the area of the current Pizza Hut.

"It was a wooden truss drawbridge," says Paul. There was a wooden walkway for pedestrian traffic where many folks fished.

During World War II, because of the proximity of the Glenn L. Martin Company, the bridge was guarded by armed military personnel. Commodore Inn proprietor Roger Zajdel's uncle, Leonard Zajdel, was one of the servicemen who protected bridge in the 1940s.

The first house on the right crossing Middle River Bridge toward Bengies is another piece of history. Now owned and restored by Harry Horney, the little house and an outbuilding at the water's edge were the site of Baker's Boatyard, where you could buy bait, rent a rowboat and go fishing all day for a dollar.

"There were no outboard motors then," wrote John Josenhans in his memoirs from the 1960s.

"Some fishermen rowed their rented boats to Sue Creek fishing shacks where they stayed for the weekend, then came back on Sunday to catch the streetcar back to the city. They caught the best of pike or pickerel, bass and an occasional hardhead."

There was a sign at Baker's: "All boats in by dark," recalls Mr. Horney, who grew up in North Hawthorne or Old Middle River, as it has become known.

The Punte family owned 62 acres between Eastern Ave. and the waterfront. They lived on Eastern Ave. where Martins Glen now is situated. Annabelle's grandfather, Joseph E. Punte, operated a boatyard on the waterfront at what is now Cutter Marine. Her dad, Joseph H., operated a garage to right of the family home on Eastern.

"My father was the only mechanic that Father Jaselli would allow to work on his Deusenberg," she adds. Father Nicholas Jaselli, an early pastor at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, was well known for "tooling around" in his shiny black "Doozy."

As a sideline, Joseph H. Punte built a speedboat, which he chartered out for rides. He also had a captain's license and guided day-long fishing parties. Boaters could buy gasoline at his pier.

Across from the Punte boatyard was a large two-story home owned by a Jewish family named Levy who operated it as The Pleasure Island Club. There was a large wooden Indian that stood guard on the front lawn.

Joe Punte's career changed in the late 1930s and his garage became the Raynbo Inn, a nightclub and bar (it wasn't spelled "Rainbow")

as historical notes on Schultz's crab house menu has it, explains Annabelle.) The bar closed in 1950 when Joe retired.

"After dad gave up the tavern, it became a swap shop, then it burned down in the late 80s," says Annabelle. The old house also was demolished and the Punte built a home on Punte Lane closer to the water. Annabelle and Paul Vleck had built a home next to her parents on Eastern in 1949 and they continued to live there until her mother died in 1987. They moved then to the Punte Lane home.

After Annabelle's grandfather died, the Punte boatyard was leased to John W. Polek who reopened it as Marine Basin, Inc. in the mid 1950s. Mr. Polek's nephew, also named John Polek, is the current owner of Sunset Harbor Marina and President of the Marine Trades

Association of Baltimore County. "I worked for my uncle from 1977-1986 when Cutter Marine purchased the property from Mrs. Punte," says John. Located on slightly more than five acres, the marina was sold to the Rosenberger family and now operates as Cutter Yacht Basin.

"My uncle and Wayne Miskiewicz' father, Ed, along with Joe Blazek (Stansbury Yacht Basin), Charlie Riley and a handful of others were pioneers in the boat business in this area," adds Polek. These families are still active in the marine trades.

Annabelle and Paul Vleck's large stone rancher sits above the Cutter marina, overlooking the waterway where her family settled. It is the ideal vantage point from which to view the progress of revitalization.

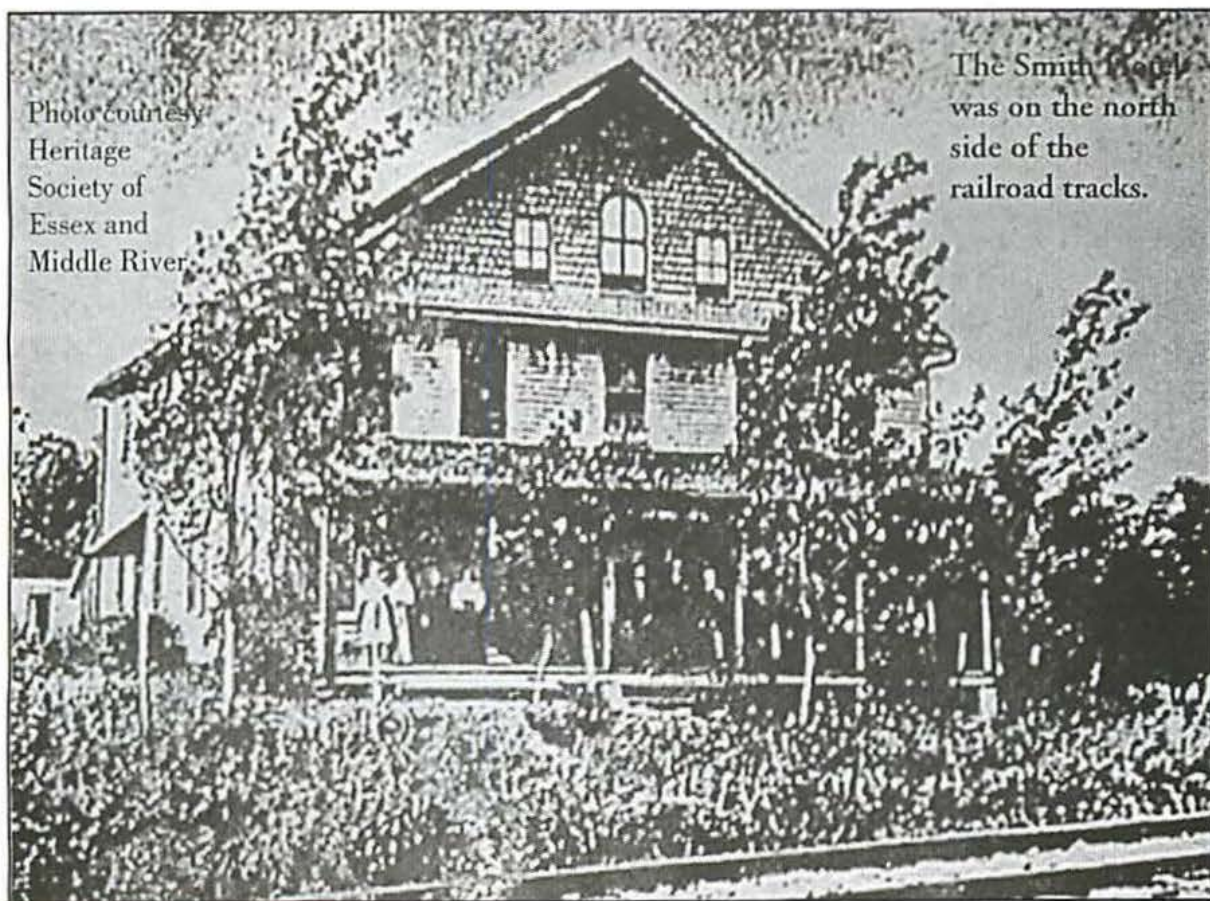


Photo courtesy
Heritage
Society of
Essex and
Middle River

The Smith Hotel
was on the north
side of the
railroad tracks.

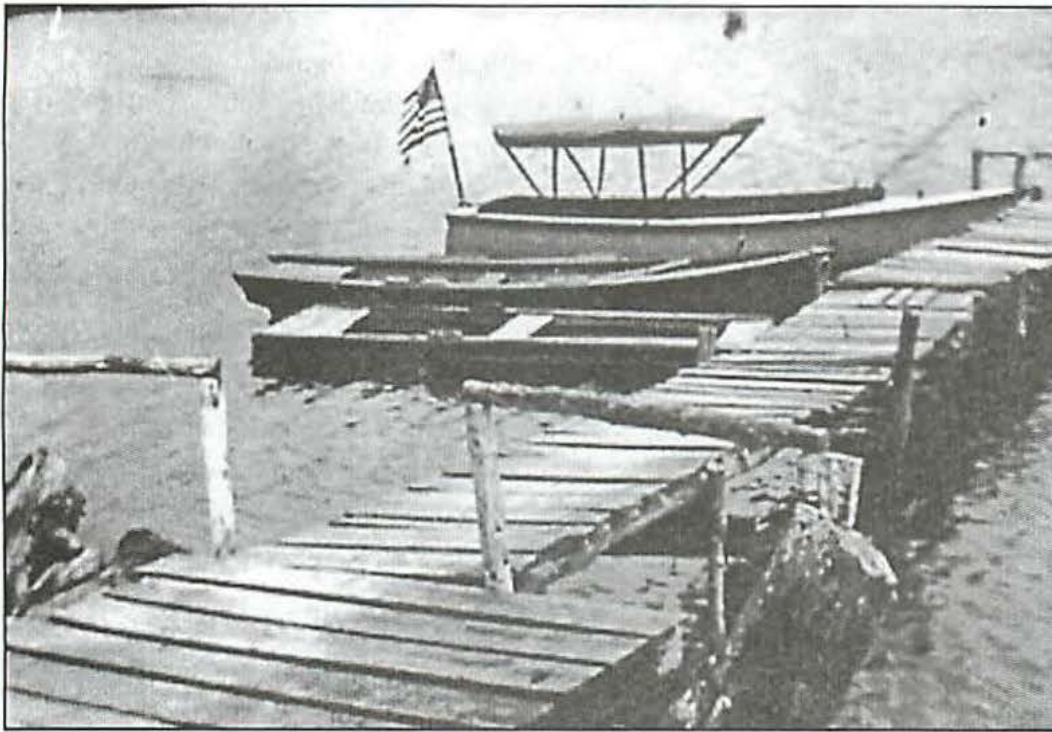
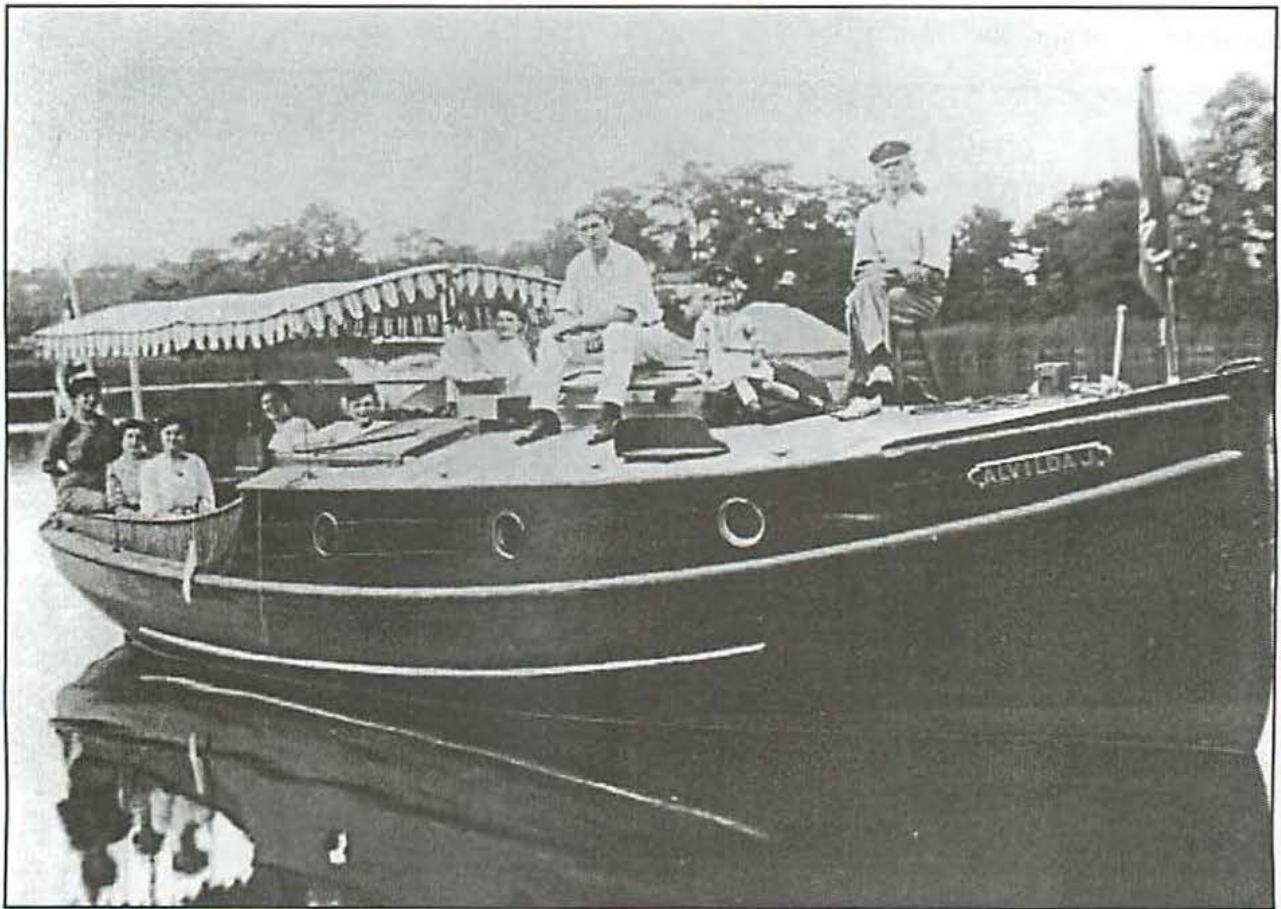


Photo left
courtesy
Evelyn Reed

*"Floradora"
style boats,
rented for
summer
outings,
sported
colorful
awnings.
Below,
boaters off
Turkey
Point.*

Below, courtesy BCPL



All Aboard for Summer Fun

The Baltimore, Middle River and Sparrows Point Electric Railway celebrated its maiden ride in the spring of 1895. Cheering citizens lined the route between Highlandtown and Back River, anxious to experience the thrills that lay on the east side of the river. There were bathing beaches, fishing piers, "floradora" rowboat rentals, dance halls, picnic pavilions and the infamous Hollywood Park with its racer dip and flying horses.

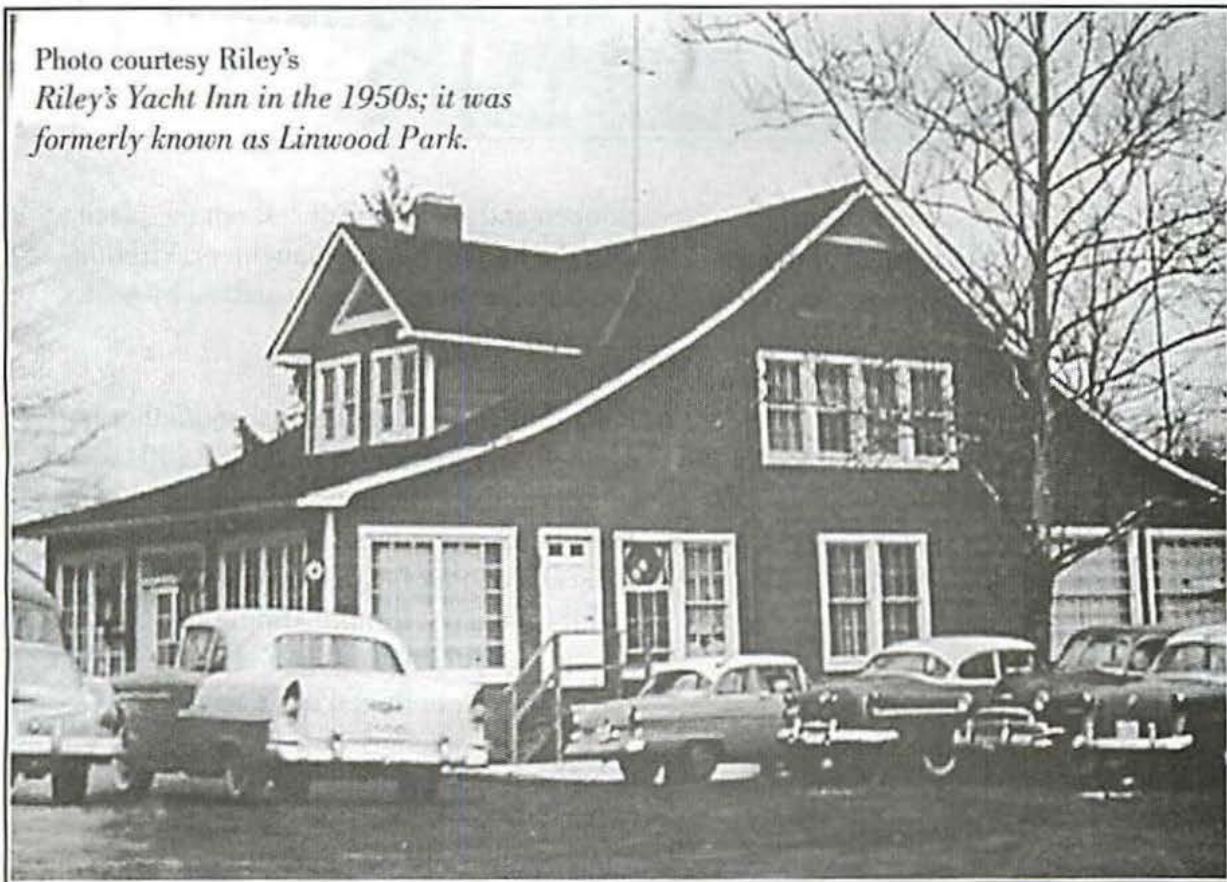
When the streetcar line expanded in the early 1900s to the Middle River Bridge, it took visitors to a more serene countryside. At the end of the line, on land closest to the bridge,

was Frank Emala, Jr.'s combination gasoline stop, grocery store and bar. He also owned a taxi service, often run by his wife, which would shuttle visitors to shores farther down the road.

The family lived in back of the business, recalls Frank's niece Eleanor Ziemba. She still remembers the old inn on the hill where the Hilltop Hotel once operated, but Eleanor knew it as Quinn's Inn; it was no longer a hotel by the 1930s. In the late 30s, the state bought the Emala property to construct a new steel and concrete Middle River Bridge.

The Middle River waterfront was known for food and fun even back in the 1920s and 30s.

Photo courtesy Riley's
*Riley's Yacht Inn in the 1950s; it was
formerly known as Linwood Park.*



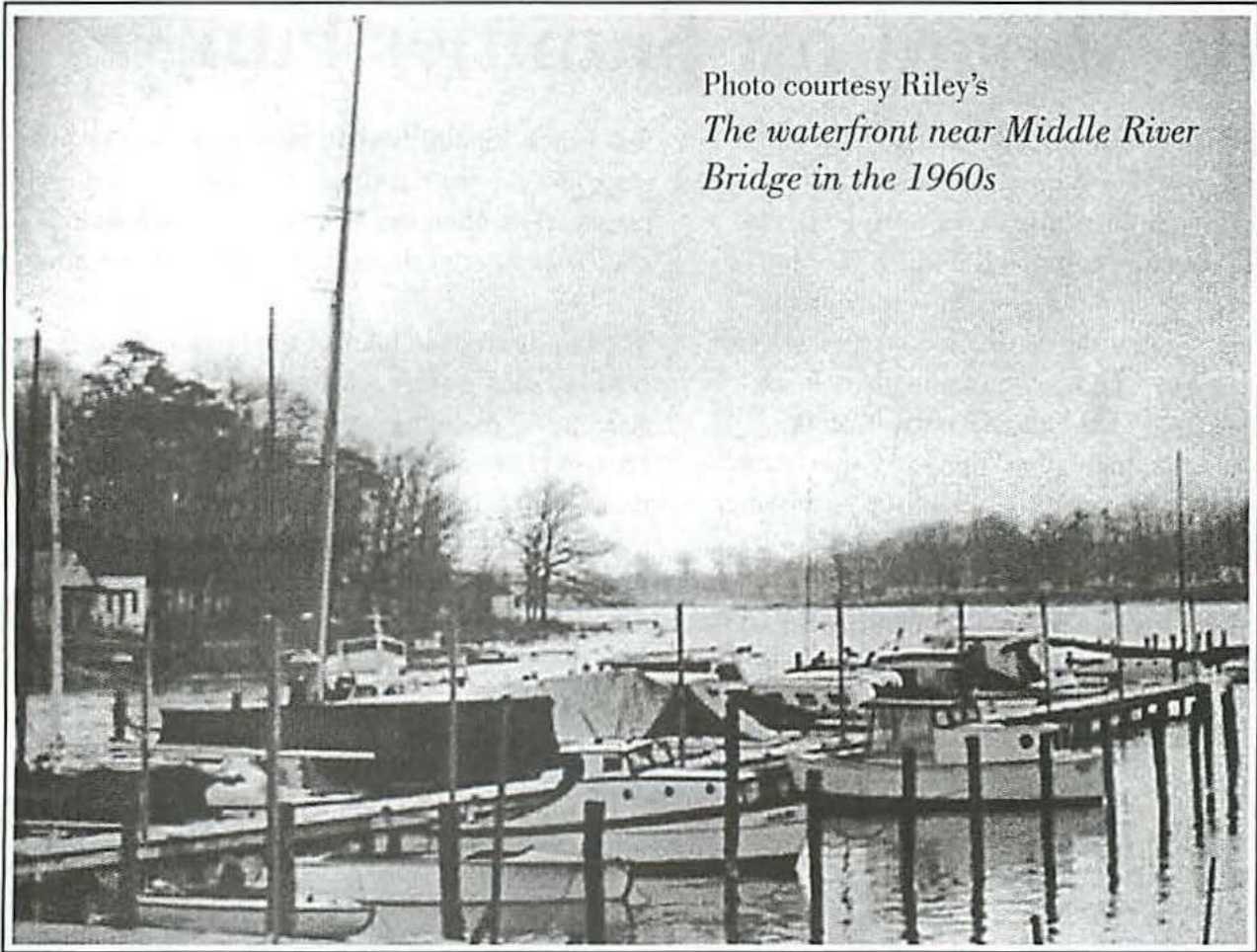


Photo courtesy Riley's
*The waterfront near Middle River
 Bridge in the 1960s*

Next to Joe Punte's boatyard (now Cutter Marine) was Linwood Park, owned and operated by the Taylor family. The restaurant and half-circle bar were housed in a rambling dormered home. Large french doors led into the brown cedar-shingled house which was very close to the water. The dining room looked out on scenic water vistas and abundant flora and fauna. Seven or eight rental cottages were situated farther down the shoreline.

The park was a popular spot for church picnics, club socials and fraternal events. Next to the restaurant was a huge trellis-style grape arbor, the fruits of which were used to make wine or jelly.

Emma Taylor, who was known for her fried

chicken and seafood dinners, ran the place with the help of her two daughters, Virginia and Carolyn. Some patrons arrived by boat, others by car or trolley.

"Old Man Taylor," as the husband/father is recalled, was known for running a still, as did other neighbors, in the woods behind the inn. Their bootlegging brought federal marshals to the scene on more than one occasion during Prohibition days, but the Middle River distillers were swift in hiding their equipment. Just maybe they were tipped off in advance.

Big time bootleg activity was taking place farther out in Middle River on Sue Island where boats transferred barrels to trucks on the mainland all night long. Or so it seemed to the

folks who lived in Rockaway Beach during Prohibition Days.

Sue Island (now the site of Baltimore Yacht Club) was not yet connected to Holly Neck so the nearest access was at the end of Turkey Point. Cousins Marian and Lillian Nickel, both now deceased, revealed childhood tales of hanging out their bedroom window late at night watching the loading and unloading of barrels from Sue Island boats to waiting vehicles.

"That was Smootie's stuff," they'd say. Smootie was the way most folks pronounced the name of "Smoothie" Mattes, keeper of the island.

But most likely, the Taylor's "hooch" was destined for the men who made and shared it at home and at the picnic grounds during special events.

Jeanne Riley Petersen, whose parents bought the 4+ acres from the Taylors in 1955, says her family lived for a while in an apartment above the bar. There they found small rooms hidden behind normal closets. On the wall were chalk markings of the booze that came in and went out of storage. So much for Prohibition.

Jeanne's dad grew up on rental property owned by the Motschiedlers, across the creek from the current Cutter Yacht Basin. He later ran the Shell gas station at Eastern and Stemmers Run Rd. while his wife Regina worked at a beauty shop near their home on Old Eastern Ave. next to Schultz's restaurant.

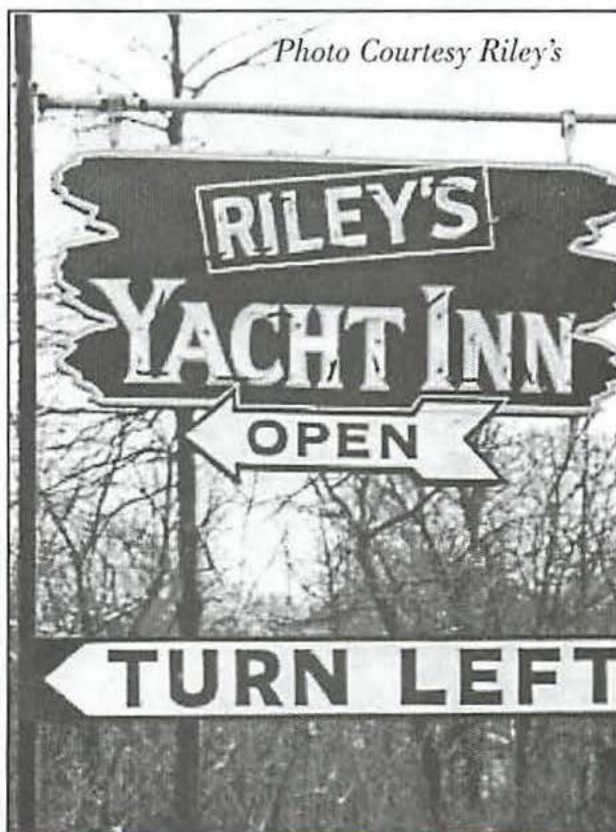
Jeanne remembers the Helldorfers who owned the land on the east side of the bridge, all the way to what is now Hawthorne Park. Now owned by Harry Horney, it was the site of Baker's boat rentals where Jeanne and her friends would buy salted eels for bait and go

crabbing right from the Riley piers.

Also across the water from Riley's, but down farther, was Kingston Point, named for the King family. Their huge home was accented by expansive porches. Kingston Rd. is named for the parcel.

The Rileys continued to run the restaurant from 1955-69, changing its name to Riley's Yacht Inn. Sometimes a cousin's band played music there, recalls Jeanne. When the restaurant finally closed, the family devoted full time to marina and repair services. Jeanne has worked at everything from the gas pier to parts and now runs the place with the help of her husband Roy. Her parents still live close by.

There are a few newer structures on the Riley land now but the old restaurant building still stands proud, charming and full of memories of happy summer afternoons at Linwood Park.

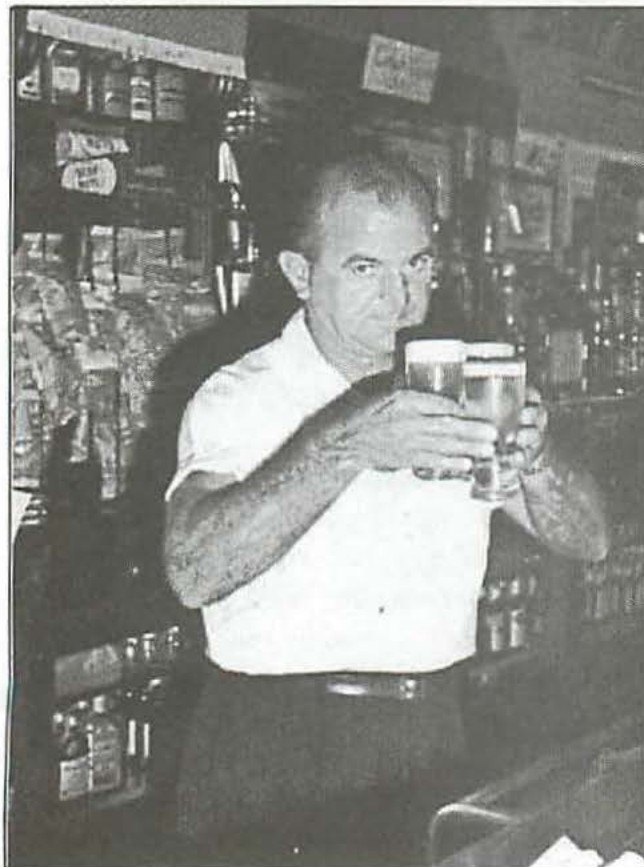


divided to provide housing for Glenn L. Martin Co. aircraft workers. The bar, however, was doing well, providing a needed respite for weary workers.

In the early 40s, the construction of Eastern Blvd. and housing for wartime workers was underway and the local population surged.

Shortly following the war, the park's old dining room and kitchen, located near the river, was reopened as the Cozy Inn, which was run by lessees including Phil Powell. It had a somewhat rowdy reputation. The building burned down in the early 60s.

Buedel's Tavern, meanwhile, was doing such a good business that a hall was added to the rear of the building to provide space for other recreation. Bands, including a group led by a Buddy Schmidt, played there.



Later, in the late 40s, the hall was transformed into a movie theater named "The Midway." A lobby and ticket booth were added and even the hardwood dance floor was altered to accommodate an unobstructed view of the screen. A projection booth was built above and to the rear of the seating, which as Essex engine shop owner Brad Wallace recalls, was simply "folding chairs placed in rows."

Many locals still remember the films they saw on weekends. Annabelle Vleck was especially impressed by the local premiere of "Gone with the Wind."

Talent and variety shows were another special attraction, adds Wallace, who went to The Midway with now-Senator Diane DeCarlo in the 50s. He recalls paying less than a quarter admission for two full features, several cartoons and a serial on movie days.

In 1954, the Zajdel family began operating The Commodore and have leased it ever since. When they took over, the movie house was being used by Essex Moving & Storage for warehouse space and the walls were hung with tapestries.

Frieda and Mon Zajdel and Buck and Rose (Zajdel) Mahle, working as partners, soon turned it back into a catering hall. Helen and Lucky Zajdel helped out with hall rental and operations. Their son Roger, along with his wife Patti, now run the bar and hall, which is still owned by members of the Buedel family.

Photo courtesy Zajdel family

Left, Mon Zajdel juggles triple drafts at the bar of The Commodore in the 1950s.

Buedel's Park, however, did not become a marina until the 1960s. It was Joe Buedel's dream, which he began to build early in the decade. Unfortunately, he never lived to see it completed. Joe Buedel died in 1966, two months after the first pier was built.

"Mom and I finished it," says Anna, who is married to J. Carroll Mueller, a Baltimore County government retiree.

The two women had hoped to lease out the



Another happy group at The Commodore

marina but wound up running the business themselves. Anna continues to oversee day to day operations, while also overseeing the care of her elderly mother, now in nursing care.

It's a legacy of hard work and perseverance that has kept Buedel's going through good times and bad. And no matter what changes waterfront revitalization brings, it will be just history repeating itself. Buedel's was a hub of activity and entertainment long before county economic development chiefs came up with plans for a waterfront destination site.

Left, Zajdel's Commodore Inn and Catering Hall today. The building is still owned by the Buedel family.





Photos courtesy Marge Ziemann
Vogler's Tavern was at the south side of Eastern Ave. and Kingston Rd. before Eastern Blvd. was constructed in 1942. Shown is proprietor William "Slim" Vogler and sons Buck and George in the 1930s. The large building was torn down in 1943 to make way for the road.



The Red Shield Boys Club of the 1940s later became the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club

Growing up in 'Old' Middle River

It's now called "North Hawthorne," but to old-timers, the small community opposite the brick rowhouse neighborhood called Hawthorne will always be known as "the original" or "old" Middle River.

Before Eastern Blvd. was built in 1942 at the height of Glenn L. Martin Co.'s wartime boom, the winding main street was just plain Eastern Avenue. It was the only way to get to Essex or Chase for residents of Eastern, Oakland, Homeland and Harrison Rds.

There were only about 20 homes in the neighborhood when Margie Vogler (now Ziemann) moved there at age 5 in 1925. Her family had had a summer shore home on Kingston Rd. for about ten years before deciding to move their ten children (actually only eight were still living at home) and tavern business from the northeast part of the city to Middle River.

Marge's dad, William "Slim" Vogler, opened his saloon in a big house at what is now the corner of Kingston Rd. and Eastern Blvd. It had been a hotel, bar and pool hall known as Fossbender's before Slim took over. The 14-room structure still had a hitching post from stagecoach days.

"I moved to Middle River when it was nothing but a prairie," says Marge. "The older kids had a fit. There was nothing for them to do in the country." They soon found a few pastimes like fishing and swimming in the cove on the north side of Middle River bridge. "You could go all the way up to the railroad tracks in a rowboat," relates Marge.

Two of Slim's sons, Buck and George, worked

in the bar while Slim's wife Margaret took care of the kitchen duties with the help of her daughters. "She was known for her crabcakes," says Marge. "She had a knack in the way she lifted the crab meat that the other ingredients stuck to it. None of us girls could ever get the hang of it."

Crab cakes were ten cents and a bottle of beer was a nickel.

During Prohibition in the late 20s, the bar was forced to close down. Slim then opened a small place on the other side of Kingston which was referred to simply as "the orange store." There he sold gas, ice and groceries.

When Prohibition ended in the 30s, Slim reopened the bar and moved his family to live upstairs as one of the sons took over the house on Oakland. Marge was still working in the kitchen. "Every Friday we'd have free food — rock fish, cod fish cakes, potato salad, cole slaw," remembers Marge.

Transportation before Eastern Blvd. was built was tedious. A dual lane ramp crossed the railroad tracks with a tunnel, which still exists, for foot traffic. Marge attended Orems School for one year before Middle River School (later called Martin Blvd. Elementary) opened at what was Bowers farm. She walked through the tunnel to get there.

In 1941, Marge wed Mel Ziemann and moved to Highlandtown, but in just a year, he was off to war, joining the Seabees. Everyone in the family helped in the war effort, Marge and her sister Ruth getting jobs at the Martin Co., others turning spare bedrooms into sleeping

quarters for weary workers. The jobseekers were coming from the south with no money, nothing but the clothes on their backs, to gain employment in the aircraft industry.

"My father helped many a one," says Marge. "If they had no money, he'd stake 'em their first paycheck."

Marge's sister Ruth worked in the gas mask factory at Martin's and was a USO hostess at Victory Villa center as well. She was quite a "looker" and even entered the Miss USO beauty pageant. Ruth was disqualified, however, for breaking the contest rules. "She wore a two-piece bathing suit instead of a one-piece," laughs Marge. The military men in attendance didn't seem to mind — Ruth was a winner in their book.

Marge, on the other hand, had it rough at Martin's. She was the only woman on a machine gun line and the men didn't take too kindly to a female opening gun cases and assembling weapons.

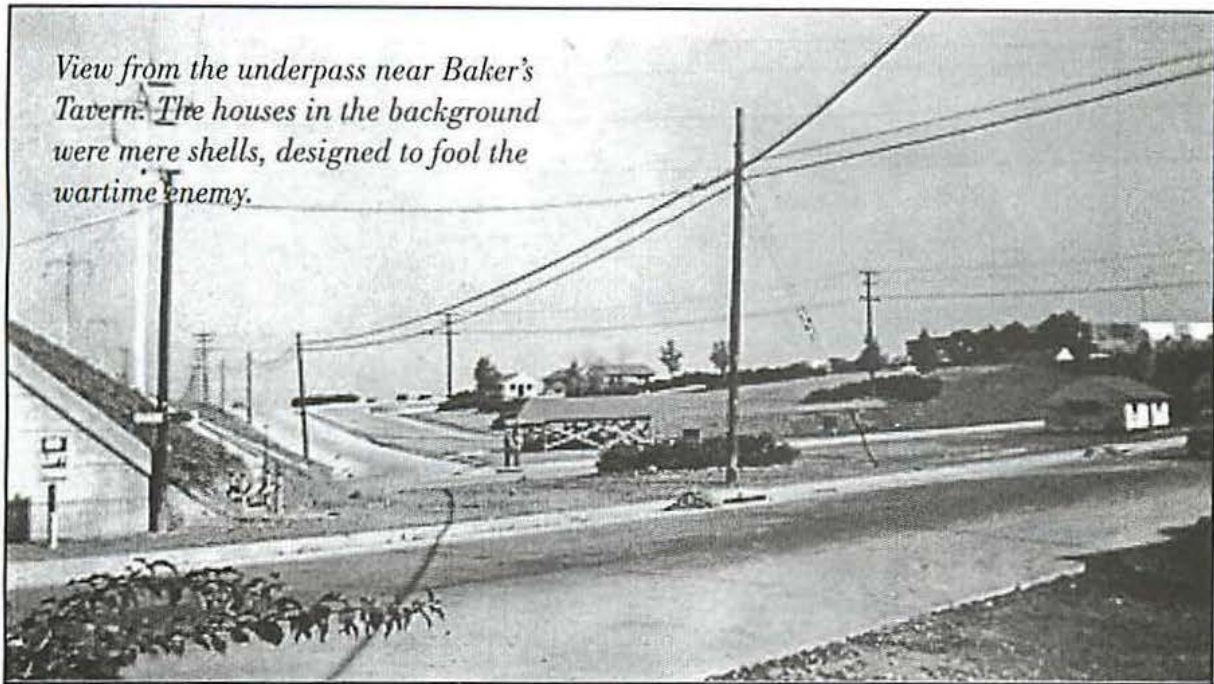
"The men hated me," relates Marge. "They even put me through a blindfold test where I had to put my hand in a box and pick out a screwdriver. They filled the box with baby mice. I screamed so hard, they said, I drowned out a B-26 motor upstairs!"

"But I read books and asked questions and got real good at my job and stuck it out. I worked there long enough to see every single one of those guys drafted!"

Mel came home from the war in 1945 and the



Middle River School, as it was known when it first opened in 1926. The school was later named for Martin Blvd. Many students walked through a tunnel near Baker's Tavern to get there.



View from the underpass near Baker's Tavern. The houses in the background were mere shells, designed to fool the wartime enemy.

couple settled in Highlandtown. In 1961, they bought a shore home in Holly Beach. Their son John has earned fame as the leader of the Colts, and now Ravens, band.

Memories of the old days in the "original" Middle River are etched deeply in the hearts of those, like Marge Ziemann, who grew up there.

Photos courtesy Marge Ziemann



The USO Pageant of States in 1944. Many local beauties participated.

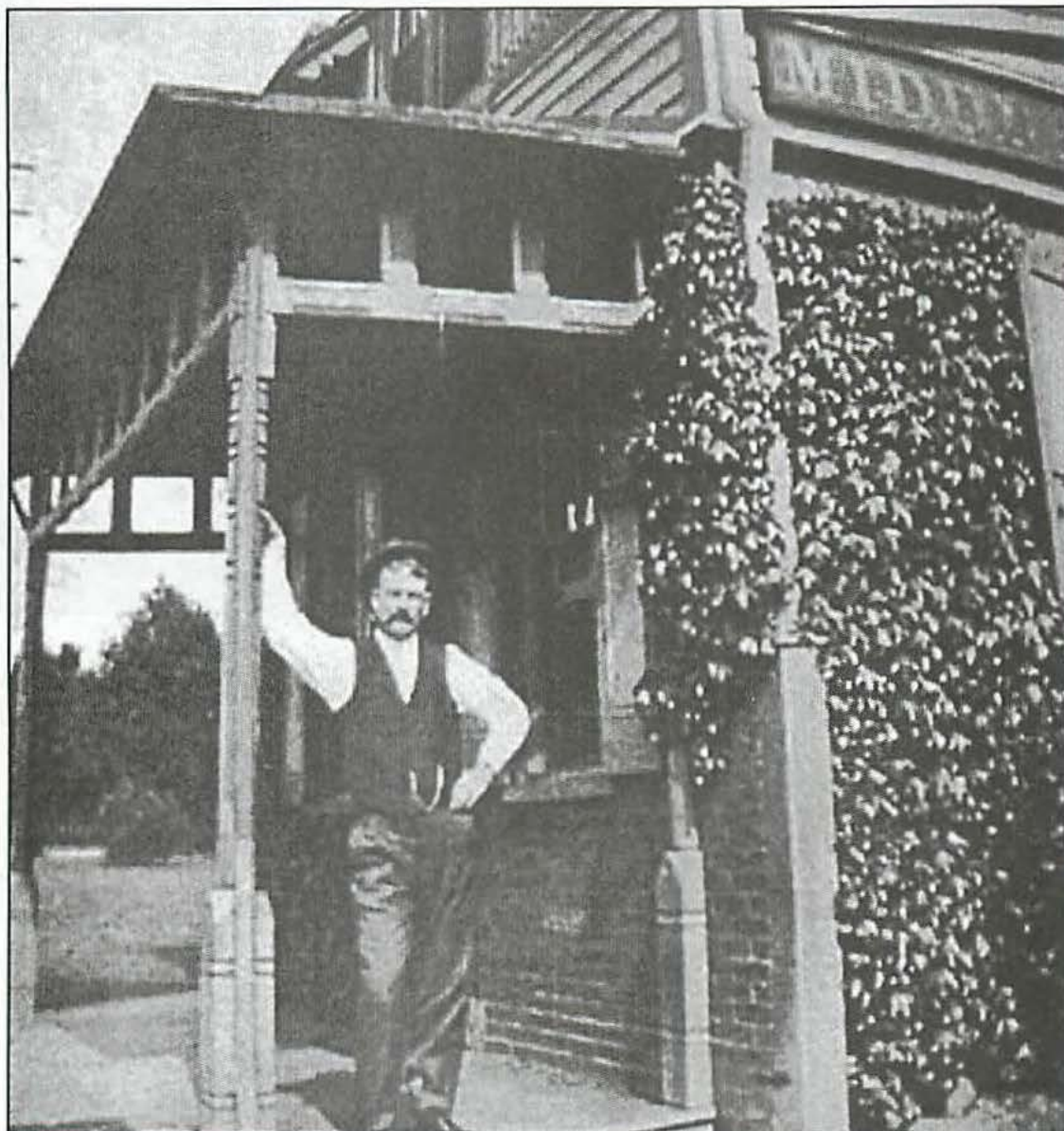


Photo courtesy Coffman's
*Middle River's first
 Stationmaster, above, was
 Joseph Jeffers. The train
 station was quite an ornate
 structure.*



Old Middle River Stays On Track

Some of Old Middle River's earliest settlers were the Smiths, Helldorfers, Kimmels, Jeffers, Hughes, and Harrisons.

In the settlement, originally to be called Middleton according to a real estate promotion, was a railroad station, a hotel and a post office, plus two saloons and a general store to serve only a handful of houses.

Joseph Jeffers, who moved to Middle River with his wife, son, daughter and two nieces in the late 1800s, was the railroad stationmaster for many years. Some old-timers still recall the train slowing down as it approached the station to hook a bag of mail that was suspended above and to the side of the tracks.

In 1892, William Louis Smith built a hotel on the west side of the railroad tracks which also housed a bar and the area's first post office, according to memoirs written many years ago by his daughter, Edith Smith Asher. In 1896, a new post office was built and John Hughes then took over as postmaster.

Mrs. Kimmel, a widow, owned a small grocery store two blocks south of the railroad station but on the west side of the tracks. The Helldorfers had a saloon at the corner of what later became Eastern Ave. and Harrison Blvd.

Edith's family "operated the only hotel in town," she wrote in an article published by the Heritage Society of Essex and Middle River in the 1960s. The Smith Hotel was on the west side of the tracks, almost directly across from the RR station. Her mother had a fit about moving from Anne Arundel County to "that

wilderness of farms and swamps" but Mr. Smith stuck to his guns, arguing that Middle River was a great fishing spot and would draw hordes of customers when the word got out.

He was right and on weekends during fishing season every bed in the seven-room hotel was filled and extra beds were set up. The bar did a booming business as well. On Sunday evenings when the fishermen returned, Anna recalled farm wagons full of laughing, singing anglers holding up strings of bass and bluegills.

By 1900, there were about a dozen new residents in the neighborhood, wrote Edith, including a new doctor, who had the only telephone in town. The only other physician in the entire region was Dr. Mace (for whom Mace Ave. is named) who lived on what is now Franklin Square Hospital property.

Information about Dr. John Harrison, for whom Harrison Blvd. is named, was provided to Marie Knapp by George Carville Porter, who passed away in 2001.

In an unspecified publication, it was written, "John W. Harrison was a prominent and successful young physician of the twelfth district, residing at Middle River. He was born in Virginia in 1869 to William H. and Annie A. (Boisseau) Harrison.

"This branch of the Harrison family were distant relatives of President William H. Harrison, and were quite prominent and influential citizens of the Old Dominion.

"Dr. Harrison attended public and private schools and studied medicine at the College of

Physicians and Surgeons at Baltimore and graduated in 1890. For two years he engaged in practice in Prince George County, Va., then practiced his chosen profession in Middle River where he soon succeeded in building up a large and lucrative practice."

In 1891 Dr. Harrison married Miss Fannie T. Gwyn. They had three children, Mary Carrey, Annie B. and William H. The doctor erected a handsome residence in Middle River around the turn of the century. He and his wife held membership in the Episcopal church and occupied an enviable position in social circles. His political support was always given the Democracy."

Dr. Harrison's large home later became Ivy Hall Nursing Center, operated for many years by the Cammack family. It is now beautifully restored and divided into several apartments.

For youngsters, there was only one school to attend and it was located a mile away from home. Orems School, a one-room schoolhouse, was located at what is now Orems Rd. and Glider Drive in Aero Acres. Miss Sarah Pielert was the teacher and had a reputation for strict discipline. It was said that she wore 15 petticoats under her long skirt and a high neck blouse fastened with a brooch. Her hair was drawn back in a tight bun.

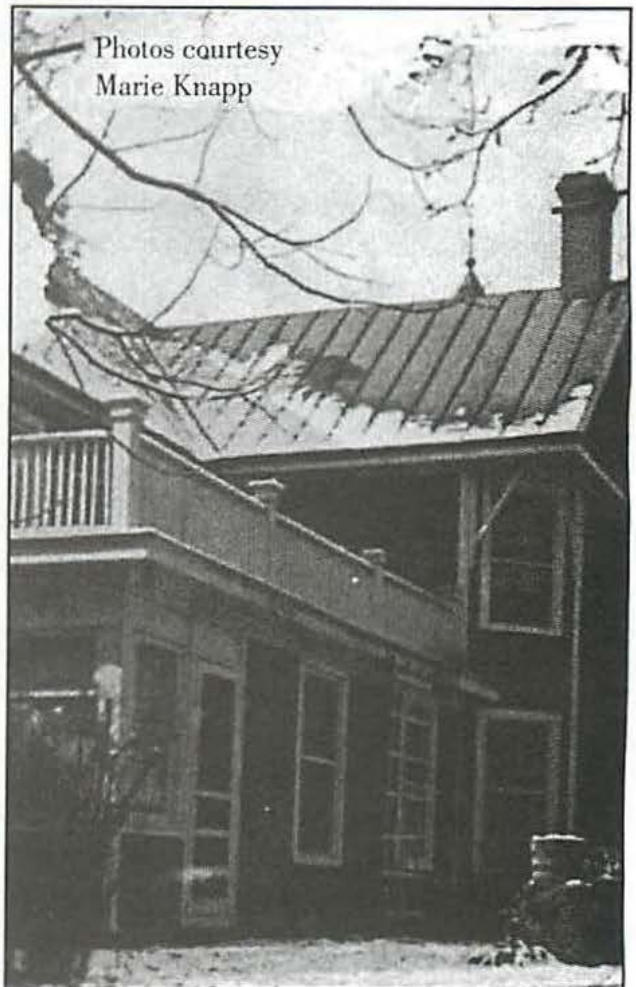
Miss Pielert commuted to the school by train and on frigid days would bring along her ice skates and glide to school. If the weather got too bad, she would leave enough work to keep the students busy for the rest of the day, and board the next train home.

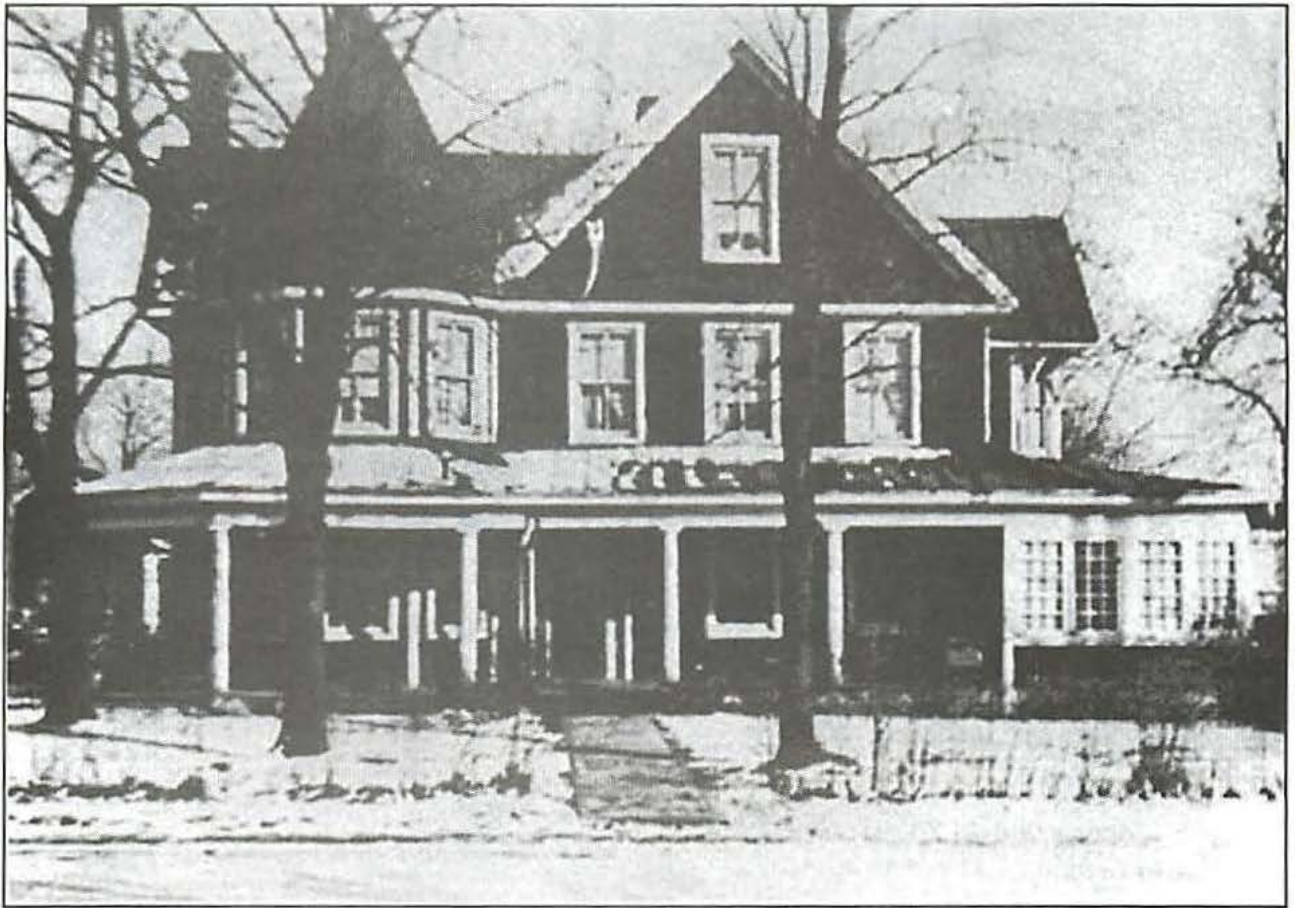
Children sat two at a desk where they ate lunch as well as "did their lessons." Each day they sang the National Anthem and said a

prayer from the Bible. One person would arrive early each morning to light a fire in the pot-belly stove and pupils took turns ringing the school bell in the morning, at recess, lunch-time, and dismissal. Bad behavior drew severe punishment: Wearing a dunce cap while seated in front of the class, writing sentences, or worst of all, going out in the hall for a whack with a rubber shoe!

Edith Smith Asher loved growing up in Old Middle River nonetheless. She went on to State Normal School, graduating in 1904, then going on to teach for 13 years at Bengies School. Her family sold the hotel in 1917 and the site is now part of the Aero Acres community.

Below, the home of Dr. John Harrison



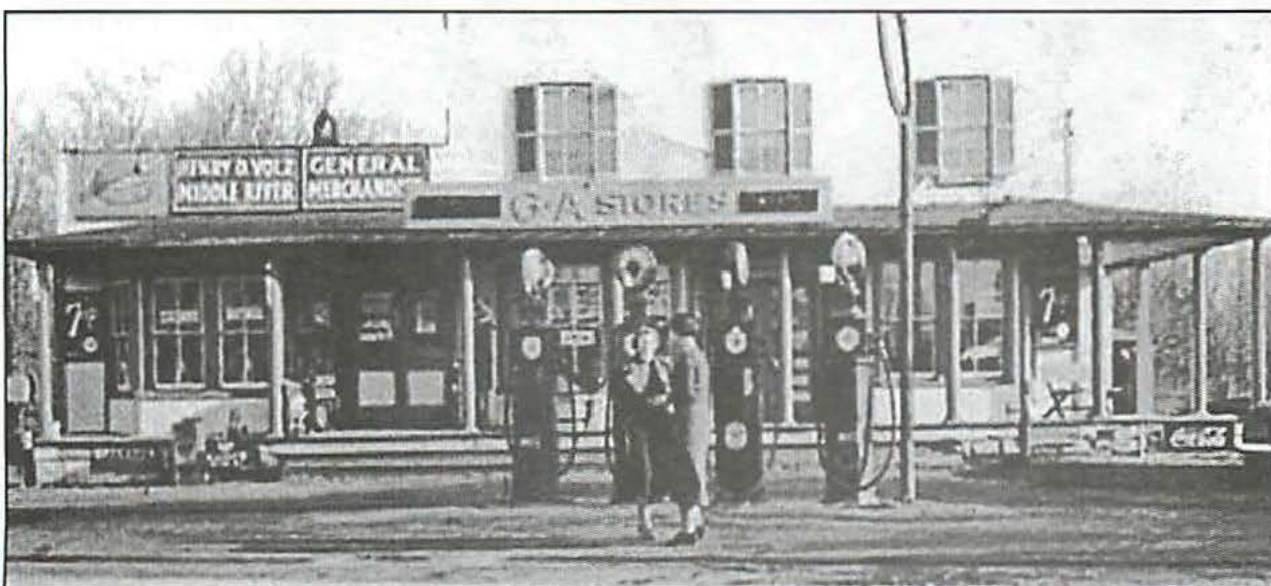


The large Victorian Harrison house, above, was built at the turn of the century by Dr. John Harrison for whom Harrison Blvd. is named. It later became a nursing home and now (left) is beautifully restored and divided into several apartments. It stands as a landmark in Old Middle River.



Photos courtesy Volz family

An eastward view of Eastern Ave. from Volz's store in the 1930s shows barren land heading toward the Martin Company. The general merchandise store of Henry and Helen Volz, located in what is now the median of Eastern Blvd. at Volz Ave., also sold gasoline. Their son and three daughters all helped run the store and the family lived upstairs. When Eastern Blvd. was built in the early 1940s, the building was physically moved back to accommodate the new road. Henry Volz later sold to the Geresbecks. The old Geresbeck's store was on the southeast side of Eastern Ave. and Kingston Rd. (east of the current McDonalds). It later moved to the southwest side into a larger store and finally into the Hawthorne shopping center.



The Way Things Used To Be

As you envision Old Middle River before the construction of Eastern Blvd., remember that businesses such as Vogler's Tavern and Restaurant and stores such as Knapp's Grocery and Henry D. Volz's General Merchandise were in the middle of what is now the dual lane highway. Vogler's was first heading eastward from the bridge, then Knapp's, then Volz's, which was later sold to Geresbeck's.

Across the original Eastern Ave., on the corner by Harrison Ave., was a coal yard owned by the Streckfus family (situated where Sid Williams Realty later operated). Mr. Helldorfer sold the property to George and Mamie Streckfus in 1924, recalls their daughter Mary Catherine Streckfus Banz. The family lived in a house next door and their business became known as Middle River Coal Supply. Five trucks delivered coal, which was widely used for fuel, throughout the area. The company also sold feed and fertilizer "because everyone had a little garden in their back yard."

Mary Catherine was just beginning high school at the Institute of Notre Dame in Baltimore City when her family moved from O'Donnell St. to Middle River. She traveled by streetcar several hours each day to continue her education and graduate from IND.

Mr. Strohmingher had a store where Faith Lutheran Church stands now, she recalls, and there you could buy penny candy and post cards. A dry-cleaning business was in the same area, as was a seamstress, Mrs. Helen Kenrod, who is said to have lived to 102.

Mrs. Banz recalls that the bridge across Middle

River was so narrow that two cars could barely pass. One evening, a coal truck was returning to the yard as another truck came by, turning the Streckfus vehicle on its side. "The load of coal lay there for years," she remembers. The coal yard eventually made way for a large structure where Mary Catherine and her husband Joseph later opened Banz Hardware Store.

Also in the vicinity of Harrison Blvd. was Fink's drygoods, Kaplan's shoemaker shop, Short's grocery store, and the first union hall for Glenn L. Martin employees. Harrison's Beauty Shop, on the street of the same name, was operated by Earl and Annabelle Harrison (no relation to the doctor) who crimped and curled the most fashionable styles for many years. Mrs. Harrison, whose mother lived across the street, was known for her lavender-white hair and tiny waistline. The Harrisons, as did many of the neighbors, leased rooms to Martin workers as the aircraft business grew.

Pat Nine, who worked for the Harrisons years ago, purchased the house and still lives there today, operating a beauty salon in the basement.

George Carville Porter's family rented the big old house of Dr. Harrison (later Ivy Hall nursing home) in the 1920s. George, or Carville as he was known, recently passed away. He planted a pecan tree on the grounds over 70 years ago which is still there, neighbors say. Carville would sell produce in the front yard "on the honor system," placing a jar for coins on the table with the corn, beans and tomatoes. His sister Edith worked at the old post office with Postmaster Frank Cohee who



Photo courtesy
Sam Baker and
Baker's Tavern

*The saloon as it
looked in 1935.
Baker's Tavern is
still operating at
the end of Old
Eastern Ave.,
near the Martin
Blvd. underpass,
where this photo
is displayed.*

lived on Oakland Ave. Some say he was so mean that he wouldn't allow you to mail a package that rattled the slightest bit.

Carville later worked at Bethlehem Steel and moved to a house on Eastern (now Old Eastern) Ave. His brother John lived next door. "Carville was the gentlest man you'd ever meet," credits Mrs. Banz.

Harry and Pauline Baker and their family moved to Middle River in 1921. Their son Sam, who still lives in the area, was six at the time. His parents operated a general store on a hill by the railroad tracks. They sold shoes, clothing, kerosene, meat, vegetables, canned goods, and Model T car parts. As word of construction of an underpass at Eastern Ave. got around, Sam's father decided to purchase land at the bottom of the hill and moved his business there in 1927.

Sam's mom was known for her generosity as well as her excellent crab cakes. During hard times, she gave away food, serving dinner on the porch of the building to anyone in need.

At the end of Prohibition, the porch became a

beer garden. "We were the first beer license in Middle River after Prohibition," reflects Sam. "It was number 13, issued in 1932."

The "electrification" of the railroad was a big event in Middle River. As railroad workers arrived to install huge iron posts, Sam's father was enterprising enough to fashion a rooming house from an old woodshed. Laborers not only paid board to sleep there, but ate and drank at Baker's Tavern as well.

Unfortunately, Harry Baker died in 1934, leaving his young widow with six children. They all worked together, however, to make the business a success. The children helped by selling coal, feed and farm vegetables, as well as delivering kerosene, which was used to fuel coal oil lamps.

Sam was in the first graduating class of Kenwood High School in 1932. He later joined the Coast Guard and after a four-year stint returned home to help run the saloon. His mother lived to be 91. Sam sold Baker's Tavern to John Leos in 1975 and it continues to thrive in the neighborhood that sometimes seems hidden "in a land that time forgot."

Of growing up in Old Middle River, "It was a Tom Sawyer-like childhood," described one of the many who lived it. Locals would walk down Kingston to the Helldorfer shores to swim or go by horse and wagon through marshland to Wilson Point to fish. City folks stayed at small hotels, hiring horse carts to transport them to Capt. George Edwards' for a day of fishing on the bay. Some would take a jitney bus ("the Oler") to Chase to hunt.

Meanwhile, the Martin Co. was building up slowly and steadily and more homes were being built in Middle River, many by the Helldorfers, a well-to-do family of contractors.

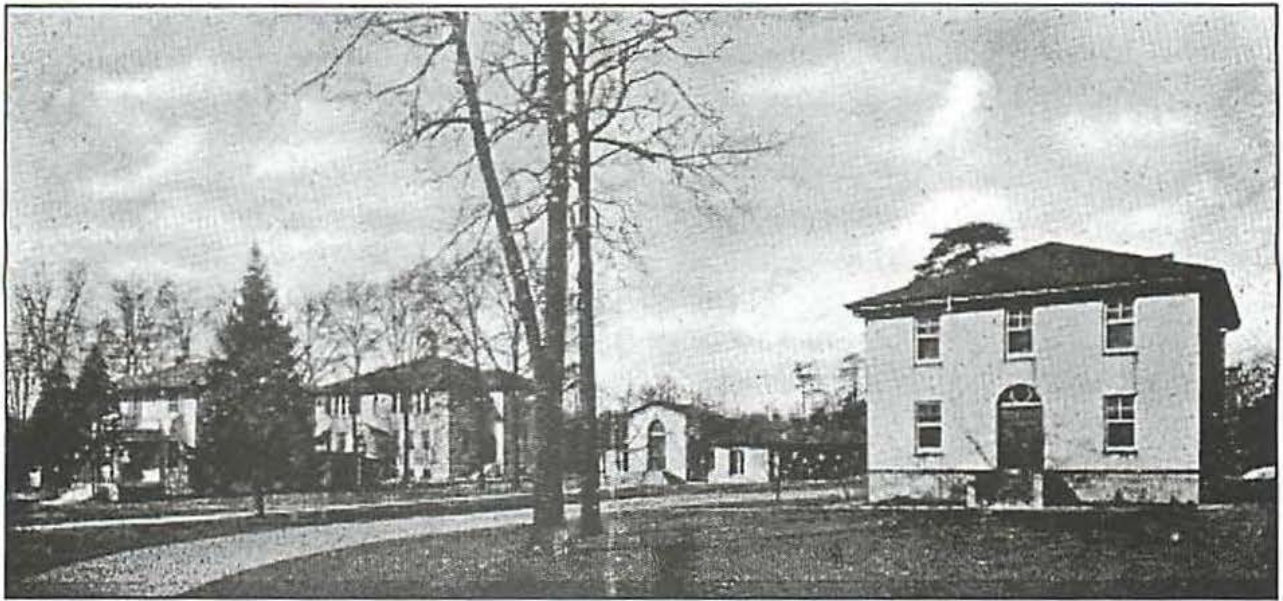
By 1940, the winds of war were stirring, the need for major roadways was realized, and the construction of Eastern Blvd. began. Tensions overseas were heightened and the Martin aircraft company was preparing for a surge of activity. Nothing in the imagination could compare to the reality of Dec. 7, 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked and World War II declared.

Glenn L. Martin advertised for workers all over the south and they came in droves. "People lived in the woods waiting to get jobs," says Sam Baker. "Middle River became a boom town overnight."

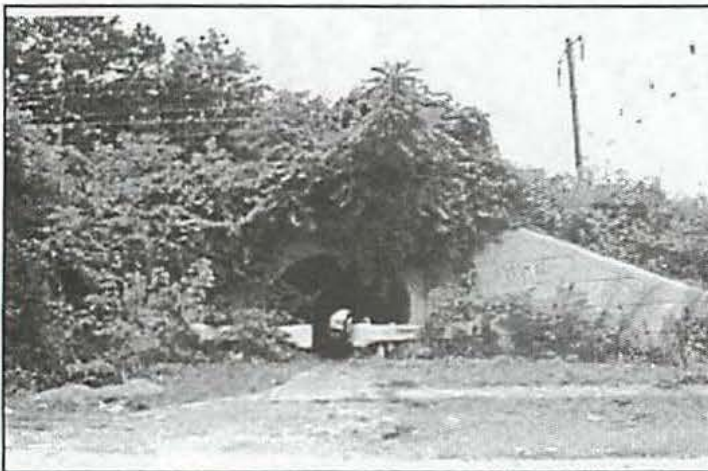


Photo courtesy Harry Horney

An aerial view of "Old Middle River" from the mid-40s, shortly after Eastern Blvd. was constructed. Just above the new dual-lane boulevard and almost parallel is Old Eastern Ave. The three vertical streets are Hawthorne Rd., Homeland and Harrison Aves.



Frederick Walters went to school at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, shown in this 1931 photo. In the 1920s, the growing youth population of Mount Carmel warranted an educational facility. As planned by Father Nicholas Jaselli, school construction began on June 14, 1925 with the laying of the cornerstone by Bishop-elect William J. Hafey.



Left, grade school students had to walk through the tunnel under the Eastern Ave. railroad bridge to get to Orem's Rd. and Martin Blvd. to attend classes. The tunnel, near Baker's Tavern and Middle River Inn, is still well traveled.

Right, the original Eastern Ave. dipped down toward Wilson Point (known then as Bull Neck) before straightening out again and heading toward Bengies. You can still see a piece of the old road near Martin Airport, at the end of the Air National Guard's fence, just around the corner, next to Eaves Auto Parts. There, a slab of the old concrete roadbed remains.



Middle River's Peaceful Pre-War Years

In 1933, the Walters' family lived in the vicinity of what was to become a Martin State Airport landing strip. Although aircraft magnate Glenn L. Martin owned the land at the time, he had not yet extended his aircraft factory to the site and the mere idea of a state airport was decades away.

Harry Walters and his wife and six children lived in a farmhouse on about seven peaceful acres. Frederick Walters, one of the six siblings, recalls that the original Eastern Ave. dipped down toward Wilson Point (known then as Bull Neck) before straightening out again and heading toward Bengies.

The Martin property had been bought in bits and pieces and several families continued to lease their homes from Glenn L. in the 1930s. It was an area of small farms surrounded by woods. Along Eastern Ave. was Alger's Store and Buck Foltz's Garage. Off the main road was Goeller's Store and a Baptist church, possibly Shining Star, says Fred.

Frederick, now 76, attended Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School and walked across Middle River Bridge to get there. He was one of the few to traverse across its high steel girders on a dare. The "public school kids" had to go through the tunnel under the railroad bridge to Orems Rd. to get to Middle River (later Martin Blvd.) School. Martin Blvd., the highway, was not yet built, so a path lined by small pine trees led the way from Orems Rd. to the front steps of the school.

As a youngster, Frederick worked part time at Holznecht's Ice House next to the bridge. He remembers 300-lb. molded blocks of ice

coming down a conveyor belt, then being rolled into an insulated storage room until ready to be loaded and transported by truck to homes all over the area. The ice was manufactured from water fed by a spring next to the small plant. Frederick helped chip off 20-30 lb. chunks, according to how much the customer wanted.

In summertime, Frederick paddled by hand under the bridge in a flat bottom boat, picking up softcrabs from the dense seagrass. "People don't realize how clean the water was then," he said.

As pre-war tension escalated, the Martin Company began stockpiling B-26s, storing the planes in a field near the Walters' home, roped off by a white ribbon, describes Mr. Walters. That didn't keep local youngsters from sneaking onto the field and playing in the shade of the aircraft's wings.

Sometimes Glenn L. would stop by in his big 1941 Cadillac and sit on the porch and talk with his dad, Frederick recalls. "It's too bad we didn't take photos back then." Soon, however, the family had to move off the land to make way for the World War II aircraft boom.



Glenn L. Martin with his mother Minta, left, and an unidentified guest in 1945.



The land known as Cool Spring Farm in the 1930s, above, and Cool Breeze Park in 1993, below.



Pulaski Highway and Baltimore Raceway

According to Baltimore County Historian John McGrain, the construction of U.S. 40 East, Pulaski Highway began in 1934 as a dual highway. At that time, the name "U.S. 40" was applied to the Philadelphia Turnpike Road that is now called MD Route 7.

"The new dual highway created a lot of complaints which are reflected in old newspaper clippings," says McGrain. "Someone wanted to call it 'Muskrat Trail' and another the 'Controversial Highway'. Most of the 1814 bed of the turnpike road was bypassed," he explains.

"The Baltimore County portion of the dual highway was opened in 1938. In November 1937, the State Roads Commission had put up signs marking the route as 'Governor Nice Highway' but the Federal agency objected to naming a federally funded road for a living person. The Governor's position was to find another name because he preferred to be a living person."

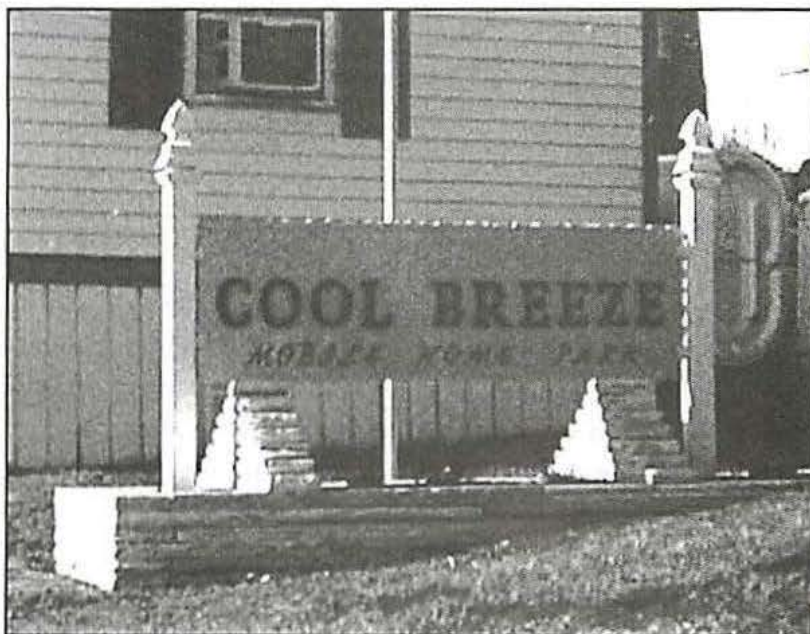
The General Assembly voted in April 1943 to call it the Pulaski Highway in honor of the Polish general who had recruited his own "Pulaski's Legion" in Baltimore in 1778 and had traveled the original post road with his elite force in both directions in 1778 and 1779. (The name Lafayette Highway had been defeated as well as Kosciusko-Pulaski Highway.)

The hill at the corner of what now is Martin Blvd. and Pulaski

Highway was crowned by a large farmhouse — which is still there today as the centerpiece of a mobile home park. "Cool Spring Farm" along with 104 acres was purchased by Edward I. and William Rutkowski (brothers) in 1924 or earlier for \$15,000 from a Mrs. Seling, according to Lorrie Erdman of Bowleys Quarters, whose father Charles Rutkowski was born in the huge house. "In about 1934 they purchased 20 acres for \$2,000 from a Mr. Douglas and the final three acres from Mrs. Mohr for \$1,000 in 1935 to complete the farm."

The final purchase put the property up to Rt. 40. Neighboring farms were called "Chevy Chase," owned by John Cole, and "Mount Hayes," owned by the Golomboski's.

The house was built around 1867 out of cypress and white pine, according to Lorrie's research. Mrs. Seling built the barn for \$700 and paid workers \$1 per day plus tobacco to do the construction. "In 1927 my grandfather and his brother put three rooms on the back of the



Interest in harness racing has zoomed all over the country. It was inevitable that Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and environs — famed in horse-racing tradition—should have its own harness track.

It was a challenge and an opportunity. The men who sponsored the Baltimore Raceway conceived a racing institution that would add to the glories of this area as a racing center, and a new entertainment industry that would benefit the entire business community.

The talents of able architects and renowned builders were engaged to build America's finest harness track. A million and a half dollars was appropriated to do the job.

The goal—twenty nights of trotting and

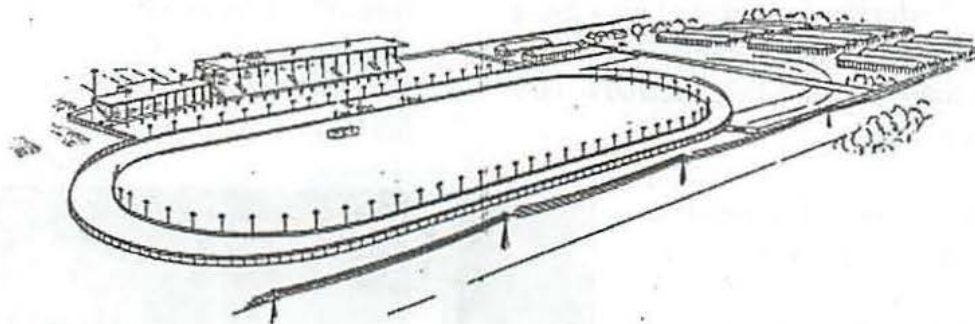
pacing that will establish the Baltimore Raceway as America's finest trotting track.

The purses will be attractive. The horses will be among the best in the land. The personnel will be hand-picked to serve the public efficiently.

From the caterers, Harry Stevens and Co. to the pari-mutuel equipment, every operational detail has been planned and executed with care—and with one object: "to please the patrons."

The opening night will be Friday, July 14, 1950. It will be a gala occasion for Baltimore . . . a milestone in Maryland racing history . . . an unforgettable event in sportsdom. May we expect you?

*Board of Directors
Baltimore Raceway*



house. The builder was Mr. Hen Paper. The brothers each had large families — William and his wife Anna had eight children and Edward and his wife Pauline had five," relates Lorrie, a genealogist and family historian.

"There were fireplaces in every room early on, but later, during the 1930s they were closed off when a central heating system was installed. About that same time, an artesian well was

drilled and a Mr. Ben Eccleston installed toilets in the house. There was a walnut tree in front of the house (see photo).

In the Rutkowski photo, dated around 1930, the front porch is open. "At some point, Edward and William enclosed it. With four adults and 13 children, space was at a premium, even in a house of that size. Near the house was also a wooden water pump for the

well and a small summer kitchen of which was used for canning.

Lorrie's grandfather and his brother sold the farm in 1938 to Glenn L. Martin. The aircraft magnate made the purchase in anticipation of the need for additional housing for war workers. The brothers leased the land back from Martin and continued to farm it for two more years before moving to Upper Falls in 1941, around the time Martin Blvd. was constructed.

A portion of the land sold to Martin was on the opposite side of Martin Blvd. In 1949, Martin sold 171 acres to Baltimore Trotting Races, Inc. and the Baltimore Raceway was born. The \$1.5 million harness racing venue was opposed by some but supported by many including the Essex-Middle River Civic Council and the Essex Chamber of Commerce. The Maryland Racing Commission finally granted racing dates and construction of the half-mile oval, 6,000 capacity grandstand and clubhouse, 500

stables with "unlimited parking" was complete in 1950.

Baltimore Raceway was dedicated on July 7, 1950 and officially opened 20 nights of harness racing on Friday nights a week later. Advertising as "America's finest trotting track, only 17 minutes from City Hall," with over \$120,000 in purses, the track debuted with great fanfare. Sadly, the business never took off as expected and the track closed in 1962, leasing its 20 racing dates to Pimlico, Laurel and Bowie thoroughbred tracks. In the summer of 1966, Pulaski Industrial Park Associates purchased the site and racetrack shareholders received a percentage of the profits.

Meanwhile, the big Cool Spring farmhouse is still in place, overlooking both Pulaski Highway and Martin Blvd. The property surrounding it is dotted with mobile homes and has operated for many years as "Cool Breeze" Mobile Home Park.



Baltimore Raceway, July 1950



Photos courtesy
Clarence Pond

*Left, Bernice Pond,
Clarence's sister, at
Knapp's Store in
the 1930s*

*Below, a 1927
Model T truck on
Bull Neck Road
circa 1930*

What's In A Name?

The old name "Bull Neck" might have been derived from the shape of the peninsula. But when the land became known as Wilson Point, the namesake was not recorded.



Wilson Maddox owned land heading toward Strawberry Point, probably near what is now the Martin Museum. Strawberry Point was all marshland and became a small island at high tide, recalls Clarence Pond. Perhaps it is Wilson Maddox for whom Wilson Point was named. Another theory is that it was named for Wilson Townsend, a politically connected landowner, or for President Woodrow Wilson.

It's not that Clarence can't remember for whom Wilson Point was named, he just never asked the question of the old-timers who might have known.

Pond worked at Martin's from 1936-41 before becoming a railroad general yardmaster.

Before Wilson Point: Bull Neck

Before Wilson Point Rd. was constructed in 1935, the peninsula to the south of Eastern Ave. was known as Bull Neck and a few old-timers still refer to it as such. The name "Bull Neck" appears in the 1898 Bromley Atlas and was mentioned in old documents as a ducking shore in 1907. (There was also a Bull Neck Creek near Dundalk.)

Bull Neck Rd. spurred off near the aircraft on display at the present Maryland Air National Guard headquarters. At the corner was Alger's store and down the road a bit was Gomeringer's, another general merchandiser.

Bull Neck Rd. led to farms and numerous shore homes. Clarence Pond, who was born there in 1919, has documented the area with a detailed map he has drawn, listing names of families and the location of their property on the peninsula between Darkhead Cove and Stansbury Creek, jutting out into Middle River. His memory for names and detail can only be described as extraordinary.

Bull Neck might have been named for a farm animal or the shape of the landmass. The first properties one would encounter in traveling the dirt road in the 1920s-early 30s, belonged to the Dryers and Plymptons; the next was the small bungalow of Mary Stevens, a black lady. Another dirt road went off to the right to Daisy Point, where a cluster of shore homes, with residents including the Ortman and Manns, was located. Similarly, an area called Schultzville consisted of four or five homes, presumably owned by the Schultz family. The Josenhans family also owned land in the vicinity of what later became known as Wilson Point.

Next was a building known as the jailhouse because of the iron bars on the windows. Legend had it that the 4-room building was constructed to hold English prisoners. It later housed summertime renters. Also on the Darkhead Cove side was Wilhelm's store, which later became a well-known steakhouse. It has recently been purchased by the county and is destined to become parkland.

A little farther down on the Stansbury Creek side was Pond's Store, owned by Clarence's parents, Orlando and Jennie. The family lived upstairs from the business. Groceries and hardware were sold there, with the help of Clarence and his sisters Connie and Bernice. The business did well during the summer, but during the slower winter months Orlando built rowboats to sell in the spring. He also helped build shore houses for Mr. Wilhelm who owned much of the land on Bull Neck.

Clarence was one of the few children in the neighborhood to own a bike, which accounts, perhaps, for his extensive knowledge of his boyhood neighborhood. Not only can he recite family names and locations of their homes, but also he seems to have a story about each and every one who lived on Bull Neck from the late 20s through the 1930s.

For example: Across the road from Pond's, next to today's Wilson Point Men's Club, was Dutch Frank's boatyard. Dutch came over from Germany and shared tales of working on Kaiser Wilhelm's yacht. He had a brother named Uno for whom he named his own boat. Farther down on the Darkhead side, two boats would speed in and out of Middle River almost nightly. These "Rumrunners" would dock as close to

shore as possible near Lynch's shore and unload illegal booze during Prohibition days. The cases would be taken ashore in smaller boats and quickly loaded onto trucks which sped away into the night. Clarence still remembers the rattling noise of the trucks as they hit ruts in the dirt road. He even remembers the boats' names: the Hiawatha and the Whippoorwill.

Several physicians and lawyers, including Drs. Joska, Novak and Wilkenson and Attorney Baer, owned summer cottages along the banks of Bull Neck. Also on the Darkhead side, Bob Holznecht, who owned the icehouse near Middle River Bridge, had a shore park he

called Lakewood where his family and friends would gather for parties. Holznecht lived in "a big old flat roofed house" next to the bridge, where a brick colonial now stands. He, as many others, spent just weekends at the shore.

The Wetzelsberger family had property on both sides of the peninsula, Bill near the tip, and Elmer, a single gentleman, had a log cabin on the Stansbury side. Next to Elmer was the Ely home with its picnic pavilion, named "Gladys M." for their daughter who now lives in Kingsville. Gladys remembers walking along the shore toward Pond's Store, picking up softcrabs from the seagrass along the way.

Across the road were the Rosenbergs, who remain in the area, with Gary Rosenberger now the owner of Cutter Marine.

Roy Martin's house on the tip of Bull Neck was swept away by the hurricane of 1933, the storm of the century. Oddly, relates Clarence, almost all the pieces floated back in and after they were gathered up, they were reassembled as a dwelling which stood for some years.

Clarence recalls when Bull Neck Rd. was closed to make way for Glenn L. Martin's expanded



Photos courtesy Clarence Pond
Left and on cover, Orlando Pond, proprietor, in front of Pond's Store in the mid-1930s. His family lived upstairs.

The Pond family didn't move from the area until 1940. Around that time, an Army camp, including barracks, was set up near the Marco Club on Wilson Point Rd.

A hand-drawn map of the Pennsylvania Railroad area, showing various locations and names. The map includes labels for 'Penna. Railroad', 'Eastern Ave', 'Dark Head Creek', 'Middle River', 'King's Port Creek', 'Milk Run', 'Whitlock', 'Maddock', 'Bill Mack Rd', 'Willsboro Rd', 'Dutch Frank', 'Fisher', 'Englebrecht', 'Montgomery', 'Hansel', 'Braver', 'Nagle', 'Bateman', 'Kapp', 'Hammer & Mack', 'John Lang', 'Sweck', 'Hanslic', 'Strain', 'Dr. Novak', 'Dr. Wilkenson', 'Oberheim', 'Cretollet', 'Alger's Store', 'Dymally & Dryers', 'Black Mary Stevens', 'Ortman', 'Hangers', 'Daisy Point', 'Schultz', 'Old Jail', 'Orchard Shere', 'Carrie', 'Charles Doll', 'Kraus', 'Evans', 'Herman', 'Wilhelm', 'Kara', 'Hardesty', 'Abby', 'Korber', 'Pritchett', 'Steinar', 'Lawyer', 'American', 'Chestnut Cove Rd', 'Klopka', 'Mossberger', 'Koch', 'Pond & Cernoy', 'Catherine', 'Hardesty', 'Maranto', 'Al Davis', 'Bill Chapman', 'Cook', 'Amerien', 'Tudor-Fisher-Cernoy', 'Mummas', 'Holman', 'Jacobs', 'Andre', 'Andy', 'Grebner', 'Hendricks', 'Lepanick', 'Marshall's', 'Luckners', 'Cody', 'Warr'.

Middle River's Wartime Rosies

Vi Borus turned 18, the legal age to work in a wartime factory, in 1943. "Everyone knew big stuff was going on," she recalls of World War II era. So Vi took a bus from her home on Pulaski Highway at the city line down to Martin's Middle River plant and asked for a job. "I lucked out," she says. Oddly enough, the company seemed to turn away many local women, hiring those who had come from out-of-state instead. "They didn't hire my sister and she had two little kids," notes Vi.

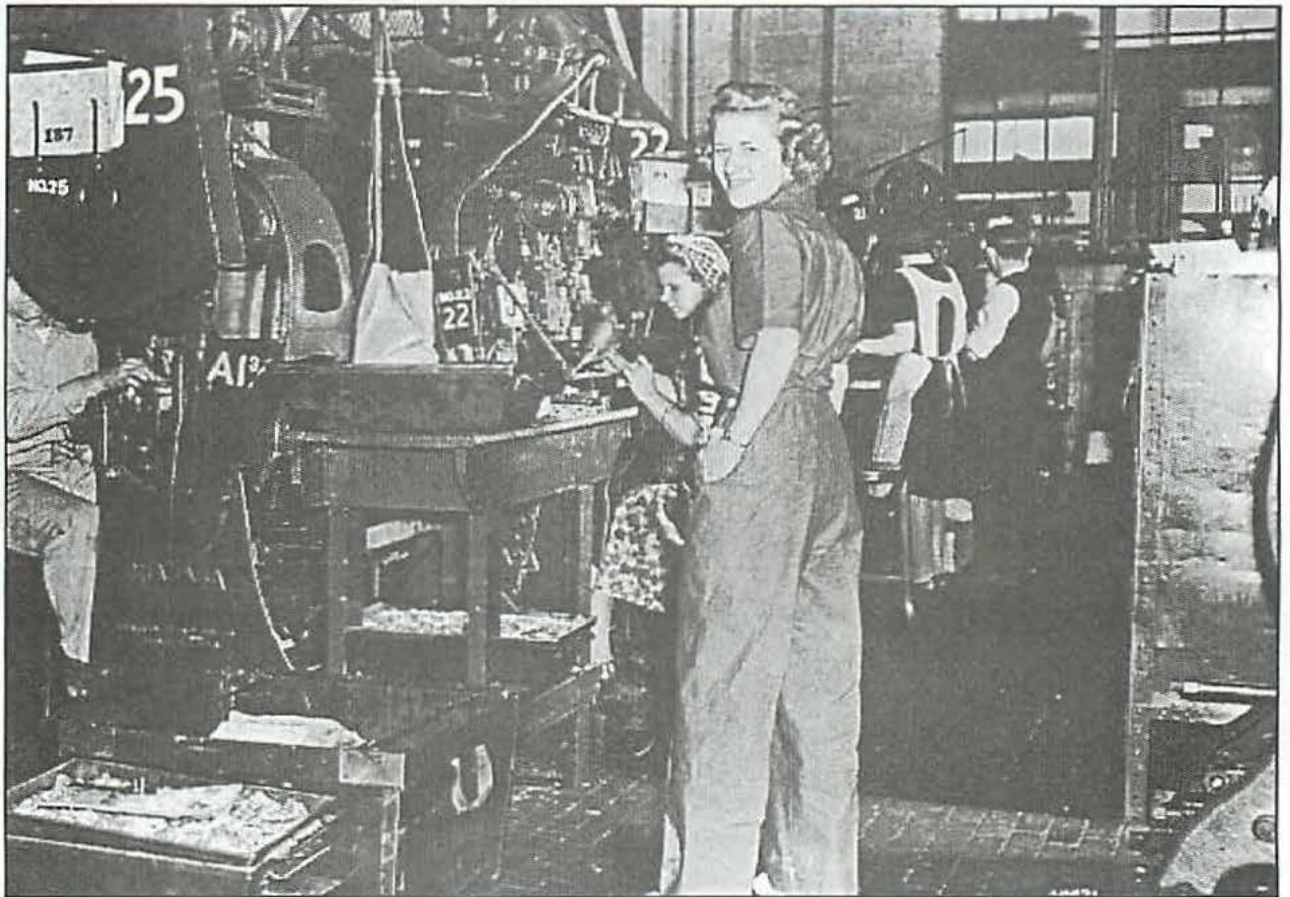
Vi, 18 and only 98 pounds then, was sent to Fayette and Aisquith St. for training in sheet metal operations, "learning to make a little canister by hand." The training was excep-

tional. "They taught us to use the burr wheel, sanders, and the dip," a trough that was used to bathe aluminum. "It was exciting and fun."

At Middle River, Vi worked from 7 a.m.-4 p.m., at first taking a bus to Martin's and later catching a ride with a coworker. "She left if I wasn't there on time," Vi laughs.

There were two main buildings with a tunnel to D building. Each employee had an ID number and badge and security was tight. "You were government property," Vi says.

The women in her department didn't wear uniforms — most wore slacks and a shirt. "The



Courtesy Martin Museum

A Glenn L. Martin Company employee wearing her coveralls, called "Martin-alls."

company was wonderful to us," she says. "At 10 a.m. we got a 10-minute break, then later we got a half hour for lunch. There was a wonderful cafeteria with good food at reasonable prices, but most of us brought our lunch."

Vi's boyfriend, William Letke, had been drafted into the Army and when he came home on leave a year later, he and Vi got married. Vi left Martin's and went to Arizona with him for a while before he was shipped to the Philippines. Then Vi came back to Baltimore and the Glenn L. Martin Co. where she got a new job as bench electrician and a raise, from 72¢ an hour to 75¢.

"You could live very well on \$35-40 a week back then," she recalls. "Plus I got an extra \$50 a month from the government for being married and I banked all of that. That's how I built my house."

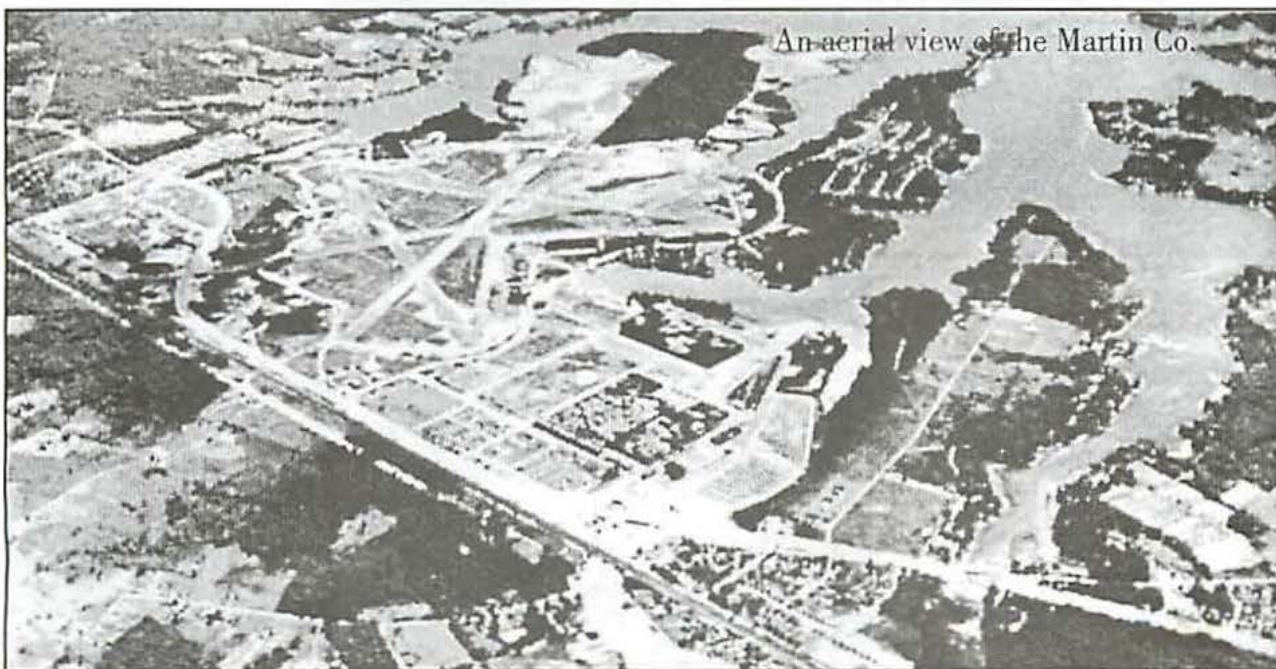
After leaving Martin's when the war ended in 1945, Vi sold the tools which she was required to purchase. But punching a time clock, operating machinery and producing products

Vi shows her wartime muscle.



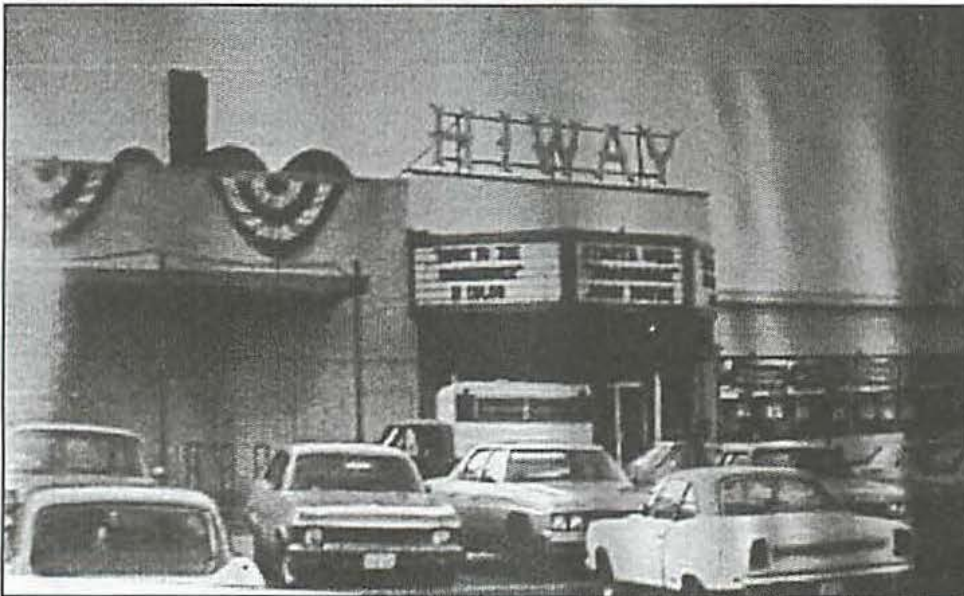
that helped win a war was a very satisfying and memorable experience for "Rosie" Violet Letke. "I took each day as it came and enjoyed every minute of it."

An aerial view of the Martin Co.





The Aero, above, and the Hiway, below, were two of the popular local movie theaters.



Hiway Saturday matinees featured previews, news, two cartoons, a two-reel comedy, a serial, and a double-feature movie — usually a Gene Autry or Roy Rogers! Often there were stage shows.

The seats from the former New Essex movie house, formerly located in the 400 block Eastern Blvd., found a new home in Trinity Temple church.



Memories and more memories

Compiled from Memories of Mars Estates web page: <http://groups.msn.com/MemoriesofMarsEstates>

Richard Murray:

My home was where the Pizza Hut now is, at Middle River Bridge. I still remember the original MR Bridge, which was on a diagonal to what the new bridge is because Old Eastern was on a diagonal. We had a lovely collie dog that would never ever cross the old bridge... what did he know that we didn't? During WWII, there was an anti-aircraft unit on Old Eastern, maybe about 2200 block (at the bridge we were 2000 block), at an open stretch between Old Eastern and the new "dual highway" Eastern Boulevard. They had a searchlight that was, if nothing else, impressive to young kids. And they had guards at the new bridge over Middle River — we lived right at the bridge. I remember the Glenn L. Martin camouflage and I can remember seeing Martin PBM Mariners and even Martin Mars in the lagoon across from Stansbury.

Cap'n Baker — Benjamin Franklin Baker, in full — lived at 2005 Eastern Ave., across the street from me (I was on the even side, 2006). Bakers had a furnace and hot water. We had a cold water pipe and an outhouse. His 1941 Chevy was CHERRY... even in the late 40s-early 50s that was one beautiful machine. He had a niece named Audrey who was best friends with my sister. Cap'n Baker was a wonderful, gentle, kind person. I think Harry Horney, having taken over those properties, has done much to keep the "aura" of what was.

Next to Bakers was Helldorfer's, beyond that there was no running water; these were places built as summer homes (cottages). I think next to Helldorfers, in the first rental unit, would be the McAnns or McAns... one or two later were

the Schmidtkes... close relatives of the Williamsons lived next to them, and they were next to the Horners; after them were the Spanglers (flew the flag 365-24/7); then the Meyers or Myers (a Fritz no less!) lived beyond the Spanglers and then there were the Campbells from Western MD... oh, the aforementioned Williamsons had the local garbage collection contract. My mother used to clean for the Kingstons... they really existed.

The road off Eastern Ave. past Cap'n Bakers was Hawthorne Road (from whence developed Hawthorne). These houses were built as summer cottages. Along Hawthorne Road and just above where they lived, was a field where we would pick blackberries and strawberries and take them home for someone's mama to make a pie. There were wild cherry trees and on Eastern Blvd.; farther out there were raspberry bushes. At Horner's we could lay on the wharf with salted eel on a string and pull up crabs... one guy pulls slowly, other guy with net. There was an old boat in Middle River, still there in the late '40's, somehow grounded and abandoned. We used it for years as a gathering place on the ice in the winter.

Bunny's Drive In was across Middle River Bridge, somewhere around Kingston Ave. Monroe's was at the intersection of Old and New Eastern. My sister carhopped there and I spent many nights on the pinball machine while listening to pre-rock stuff on the jukebox.

An old store used to be on Old Eastern just across from Banz coalyard (there's a church there now). In the '40s it was Short's Grocery, across Eastern Blvd. from Geresbeck's, and

*A B-10 warplane flies
over Middle River in the 1940s*



they lost all of their business with the new highway.

Regarding the icehouse... lots of memories there. Remember, I lived just across the bridge on the other side of Eastern and we did not have a fridge, we had an icebox. I had a little red wagon, steel, rubber wheels. In the winter our coal was poured from a chute from the truck on the roadside down the hillside and what happened to it after that was our business. My job was to shovel the coal into the wagon and take it to the front (river side) of the house and push it as far inward and possible and dump it to keep it out of the weather. In the summer, I took the red wagon sometimes to the icehouse and got a 15¢ or 20¢ piece of ice and got it home as quickly as possible before it melted too much. Sometimes, if mom had the money, she had the ice delivered. They had a sign with prices looking like 10/15 20/25 — two prices on each side of the sign. The price on top that could be read from the street was the price you paid for the ice. Ice truck stops, driver with tongs brings in a piece of ice and puts it in your icebox; we usually went for the

10¢, once in a great while mom would get the 15¢. There was a drip pan under the icebox — gawd help you if it was your turn to empty and you forgot!

Frank Rogers

I remember the “Essex movies” in the heart of Essex — not the “New Essex” in the 400 block Eastern Ave. in the 1950-60s, but an upstairs theatre in the 500 block (probably The

Alert). It was near the intersection of Woodward Drive, about three buildings from the corner, built in the 1920s by a man named Gutermuth who operated a grocery store downstairs. Wide steps led upstairs on both sides of the building from the outside — “up” and “down” stairways. There were hard wooden movie theater pull-down seats. The customer’s back faced Eastern Ave. Coming attractions were posted outside and tickets were 10¢. Peanuts in the shell were 5¢.

Before talkies, there was a piano player. An Earl Martin later became the manager and probably ran the projector before becoming manager. I remember seeing the serial “Pearl White” among the other portions of the Saturday show. My parents used to tell me to “stay and see it twice” — the whole show — in other words, “get out of our hair for a while longer.” Later the building was sold to Abe Cohen who used the first floor as a store and moved the movies up to the 400 block Eastern where the décor was more elaborate and it became the “New Essex.”

Clint Hammons

During the war, the Moms would gather up the kids in the trailer park and we would walk to The Alert to go to the movies, the men all being at work or sleeping after coming off their shift. We did not go down Eastern Ave., but the other road that paralleled Eastern. It now runs into Hawthorne I believe. That area between Edgewater Apartments and Hawthorne used to be Norris hog and produce farm.

I do not know when the Aero Theatre was completed but I think it was well after the New Essex and Alert, both of which I attended in 1943 and 1944. The Alert was a really old place and showed "B" movies and I do not remember them showing any first run movies. Like the Midway, they were aimed mostly at kids. Lots of old movies, Westerns, serials, and cheaper tickets. The Midway wasn't even air-

conditioned. Two big fans at the rear that the guys liked to throw Good 'n Plentys into. THWERPPPPP!

I only knew the Alert Theatre by that name. It was an old, dingy place, with old movies and some newer "B" movies, as I recall. It was a place for kids, a lot of stuff at a cheap price. The Midway was much newer, but was essentially the same kind of place. It had a sloped concrete floor, dark wall hangings and hard wooden pull-down seats. Great place for meeting girls, as were most of the theaters. My wife was an usher at the Aero movie theater and she was required to wear a white shirt and blue slacks as a uniform.

I remember the stage shows well at the Hiway. There were several amateur acts. I remember one lady singing "You Made Me Love You." I



Mars Estates shortly after the complex was built in 1943.

fell in love with her. (The “lady” would have to be Peggy Shoemaker, according to Richard Murray. “For a young girl she had the voice of a torch singer, as some may remember from those days.”) Liz Bass and her mother sold tickets at the Hiway.

Richard Murray

I remember the Hiway Theater from the 1940s. Saturday matinees with previews, news, two cartoons, two-reel comedy, serial, and a double-feature movie (usually one was a Gene Autry or Roy Rogers!) and Whelan’s Drug Store next door — chocolate cokes and a Seeburg jukebox on the counter.

Clint Hammons

The bowling alley in a basement adjacent to the Hiway was considered a little disreputable. I worked there for a short while. Setting those double lanes was dangerous. Pins flying all around your head. Lean against that canvas shield and get it in the elbow and not see it

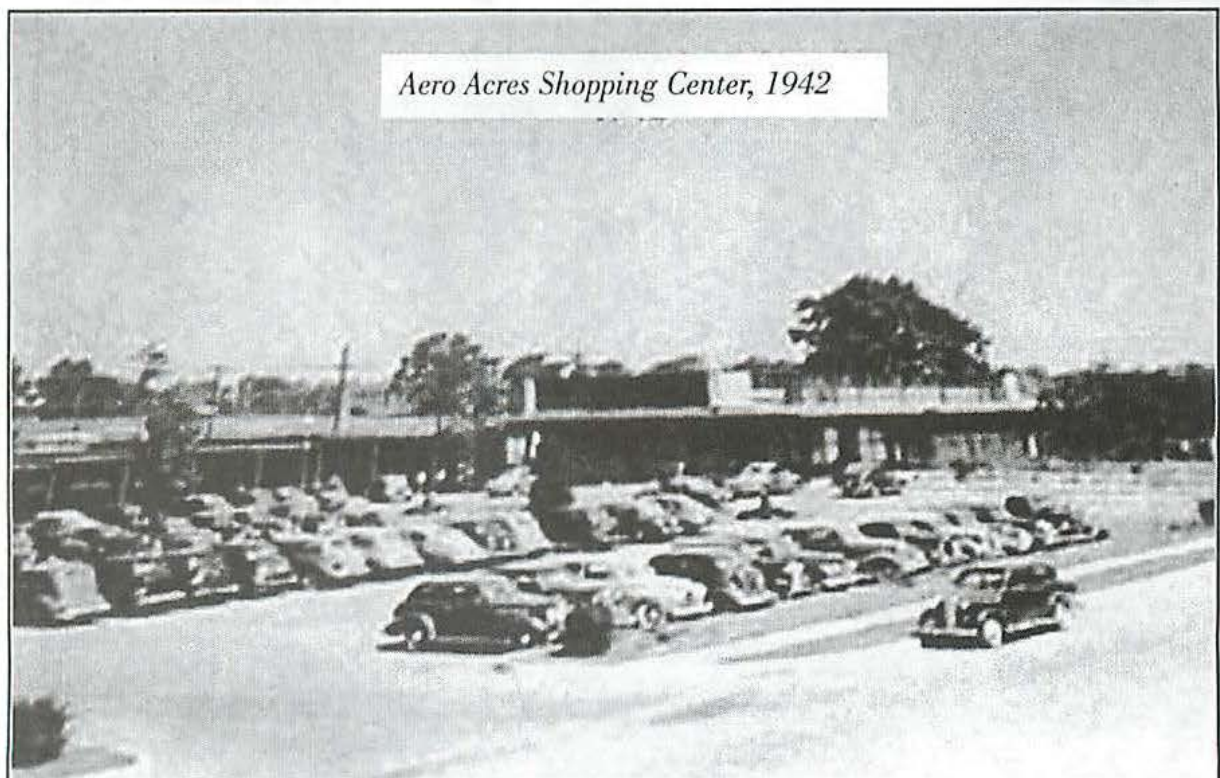
coming. Too hard and dangerous, setting pins by hand. They were ten pins. Seems like they occasionally set up kingpins, but a gutter ball would get the 7 or 10 pin.

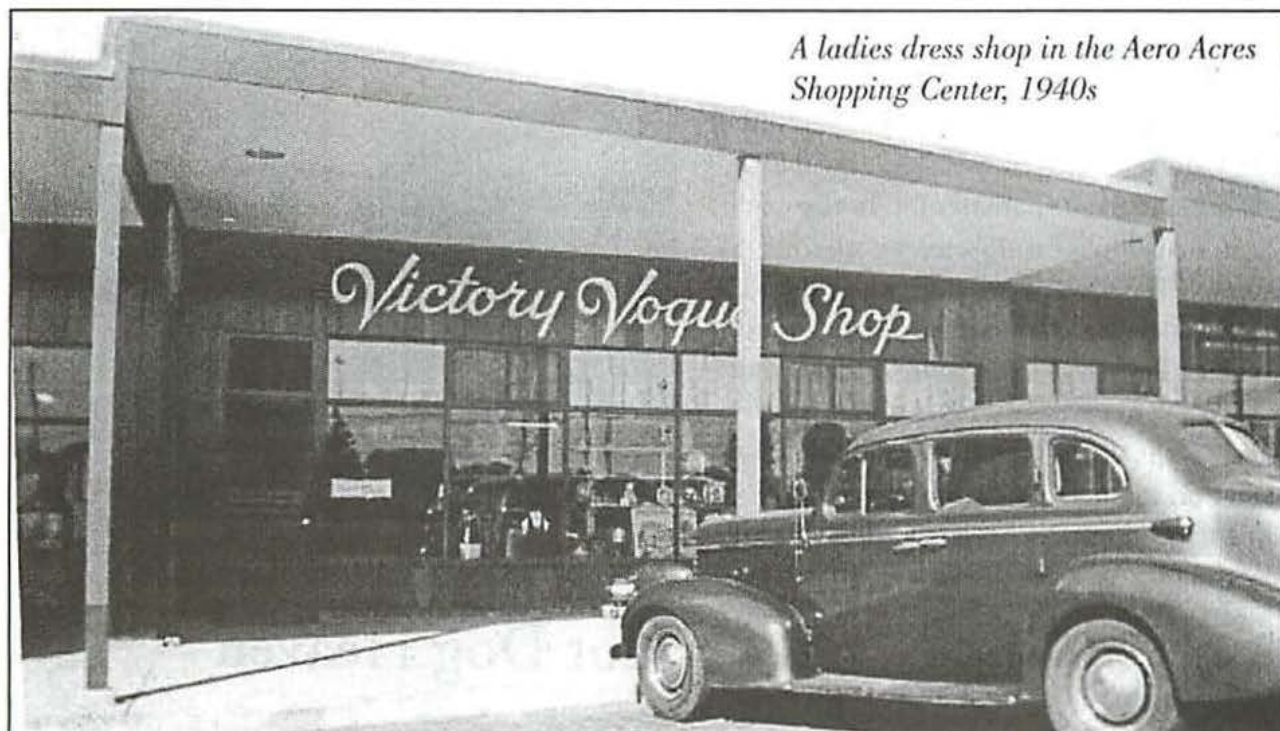
Richard Murray

Edgewater was close as two heartbeats to the Hiway. In the late ’40s some friends and I would sit on the concrete wall at the end of Walkern Ave. across from the Edgewater apartments and do some doo-wop (before it had a name) or sit silently and watch the starlit skies... no drugs, no alcohol, just friends and lasting memories.

Clint Hammons

As long ago as I can remember, Essex ended and Middle River began about where the two Eastern Aves. split. The first time I saw Essex, 1943, the business part of town was roughly from the old Alert Theatre to the New Essex Theatre. The area at The Alert was kind of the rough, a pool hall and I think a bowling alley,





A ladies dress shop in the Aero Acres Shopping Center, 1940s

both considered disreputable at that time.

Does anyone remember when Essex decided to start a Library? They had a book collection to start. I remember donating one. Seems donors got a membership, but I am not sure. How about the drug store that was in Riverdale Apartments? It was where their groundskeeping/maintenance department was later on. It had a jukebox, soda fountain and was pretty nice. A regular teen and kid hang-out. I suppose the opening of Whelan's forced it to close. Wanted to mention Stansbury Beach and swimming there and if we were lucky a PBM or the Mars would taxi out to take off and we would get their wake and waves.

Donna Jean

My very first memory in life was sitting in my little rocking chair crying and saying I wanted to go home. I was two at the time (1950) and my dad told me I WAS home. That was 1610 Rickenbacker Road. He and my uncle had

moved our families from Roanoke, VA to Essex to get work at General Motors and Bethlehem Steel. Over the years we moved several times within Mars Estates — we left Rickenbacker but lived in three different apartments on Doolittle Road. All of my formative years were spent there, yes with the happiness, some sadness, good friends, neighbors and first loves. I am so sorry to hear that it is no more.

Clint Hammons

Maybe I noticed things more, being a new-comer, and in awe of all the new things I had not seen before. Richard, you were an oddity, a native born Marylander. With the huge influx of people from other states, a native Marylander was hardly ever seen. When the war ended and everyone was immediately laid off, the rush of people leaving to return to their home state was like a land rush. The whole Middle River-Essex area was ghost town until the return of the service men and then overcrowding was the norm.

LaVerne Rothe Walker

In 1943 we (George, Marie and LaVerne Rothe) moved to Mars Estates. I was five. My dad worked at Sparrows (Spares) Point in the shipyard. I remember a store being where Thiel's was. There were two men who worked there. The store carried canned goods and fresh meat. They had to use one of those long poles with a clip on the end to reach the top shelves. It was during the time when food was rationed and the one man always saved my mother the good cuts of beef. I still have some tokens and maybe some paper coupons that were used to buy your purchases. The skinny man later opened or worked for a popcorn store in Highlandtown.

When Thiel's opened their store on Eastern Ave. there was a cleaners and a barber shop on the Rickenbacker Rd. side of the building. We used to roller skate on the sidewalk until the merchants hollered at us. Voosen's had a store next to Thiel's and Mrs. Voosen's son-in-law operated it. Mrs. Voosen owned the house directly behind Thiel's.

Behind the Voosen house there is a white building with a couple of garages underneath. My father rented a garage \$50 a month from Mrs. Voosen and I always took the rent to her. A black couple lived over the garages and the woman's name was Mary. I can't remember the man's name but I can still remember what they looked like. I believe she worked for Mrs. Voosen as a housekeeper. She was raising a niece or granddaughter named Alice and we played together and I invited her to my birthday party. She wore the most beautiful pink dress, her hair was braided with pink ribbons on the ends. I keep wanting to go to the church on Eastern and Back River Neck and ask if any one is old enough to remember these people. I would enjoy seeing Alice.



Coffman's Barrel as depicted in 1947.

Hot Dog Heaven

When Coffman's Snack Bar opened in 1947 at the corner of Middle River and Orem's Rds., hot dogs and hamburgers were 15¢, sodas and coffee a nickel. Owner Wiley Ray Coffman found a small red trailer outfitted as a diner for sale on Northpoint Rd. He purchased and moved it to the well-traveled corner, opening "Coffman's Barrel" in mid-June 1947. The name was in reference to the enclosure's rounded contour. "It was just 16 feet long and had a fold-up canopy," recalls Jim Coffman, Wiley's son and the second of three generations to operate the business. "We made \$20 the first day." People would wait in line outdoors to place their orders since there was no seating inside.

After about six months, Wiley knew he must expand so he purchased an old transit bus modified with a grill, a counter and ten stools.

On Jan. 1, 1957, Coffman's moved into the building they still occupy today, with a large grill, counter and double dining room. The menu remains simple with breakfast served all day in addition to hot dogs, burgers, soup and sandwiches.

Middle River History— Putting It in Context

Over the course of his research, which led in 1996 to a celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Wartime Middle River, Prof. Breihan attempted to answer the question "How is Middle River significant to the history of the United States?" He came up with some excellent answers and several meaningful suggestions.

By Jack Breihan

Professor of History, Loyola College of MD

Middle River is significant on a national scale, in six different ways. First, it is significant to the career of Glenn L. Martin himself, a noted American who was both a pioneer aviator and aircraft manufacturer. The files at the Smithsonian allowed me to do a good deal of research on Glenn L. Martin. It turns out that his first airplane flew in 1910, not 1909 (as he later claimed). The labels at the Smithsonian will be duly changed. But this does not diminish Martin's significance as the senior aircraft manufacturer in the USA from the 1920s through the 1950s.

Second, the Martin plant in Middle River, constructed in 1929, played a significant role in the development of the U.S. aerospace industry. The first true intercontinental airliner, the China Clipper, was designed and built in Middle River, as were thousands of warplanes that played important roles in World War II and the Cold War.

Third, several of the Martin factory buildings are masterworks of industrial architect Albert Kahn. Kahn was Henry Ford's architect. Before coming to Middle River in 1937, Kahn designed the first mass-production Ford factories at Highland Park and River Rouge. For Martin

he first designed B Building, the middle section of today's largest clear-span building in the world. Later Kahn designed C and D Buildings, the Martin Airport, and the GSA facility (originally Martin Plant No. 2) on the other side of Eastern Boulevard.

Fourth, Middle River's residential neighborhoods are architecturally significant, particularly to the knotty problem of how to design affordable suburban houses. A thousand of Middle River houses (in Aero Acres, Wilson Point and southern Victory Villa) were built on the innovative Pierce-Cemesto system of prefabrication developed during the 1930s by the John B. Pierce Foundation and the Celotex Corporation. They were designed by the distinguished architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, who also used the Pierce-Cemesto system to build Oak Ridge, Tennessee. SOM, as the firm is usually called, later designed modern landmarks like the Lever House in New York City and the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

Fifth, Middle River is important to the history of American suburbanization. It combines high-speed divided highways, curving neighborhood streets, community buildings, and shopping centers in a pattern that was to be repeated again and again as America "went suburban" in the 1950s.

Finally, Middle River's experience is significant to the social history of World War II's "great migration." Between 1940 and 1945, about 30 million Americans left their homes for the armed services or for war work. This was a quarter of the total population. Middle River was a prime destination. It grew from a

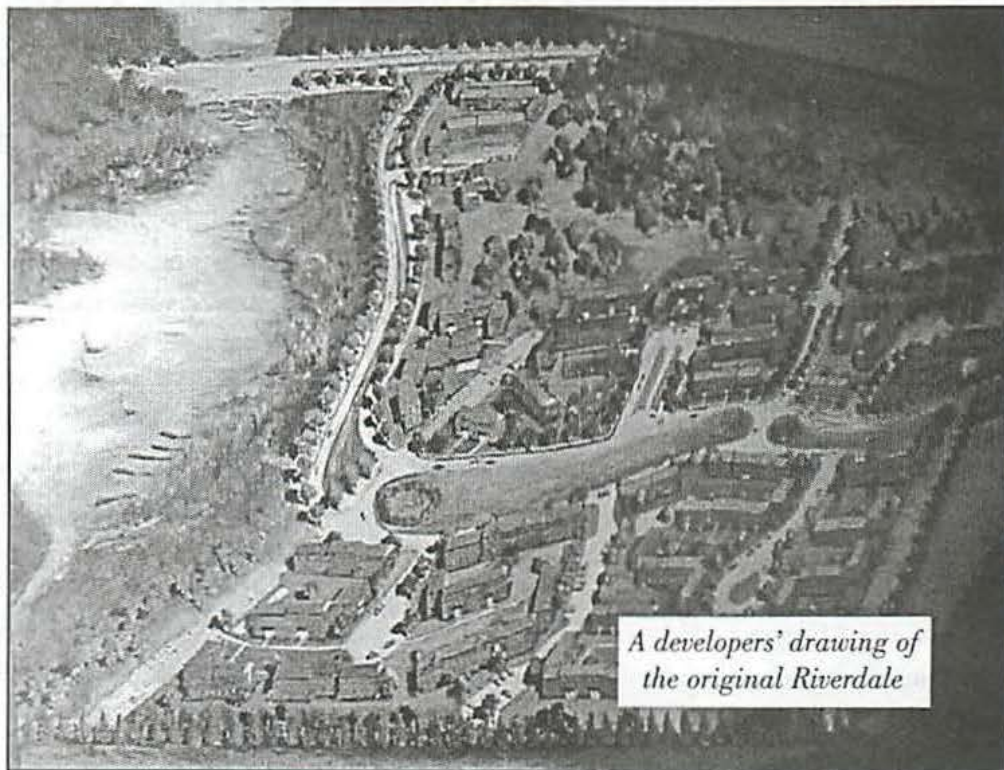
hamlet of 161 people in 1940 to perhaps 30,000 by 1945, almost all of whom came from somewhere else.

The government became alarmed at the size of this migration, and tried to slow it down by encouraging employers to hire local people, including women and African Americans, instead of

in-migrants. After all, building all those houses consumed scarce lumber and labor. And there were worries that the influx of newcomers would cause social tensions.

The government had some success in slowing the migration. By the time Victory Villa Gardens opened late in 1943, there were not enough new families to fill its 1,000 apartments. We also encountered many stories of homesickness and people's difficulty in coping with new jobs in new places. But at the same time we heard how hard federal officials, churches, and volunteer organizations worked to achieve social harmony and with the established residents.

For the most part they succeeded in achieving the national unity that many people remember from World War II. Very many of the wartime residents remained in Middle River after the war — and they're still here today.



A developers' drawing of the original Riverdale

Middle River — Historical District?

When we hear the term “historical district,” someplace like Williamsburg usually comes to mind. There should be some really big old houses behind white picket fences. One of them should be “ye olde” inn, with expensive dinners served by “wenches” in billowing dresses. There should be a blacksmith somewhere. Men in hot wool uniforms should march around with fife and drum, then shoot off a cannon. There should be a set of massive wooden stocks to punish criminals or unruly children — and to prove “Kodak moments.”

Although you can easily find the film for sale in Middle River, it is probably not what most people think of as a historic district. Nevertheless, most Middle River buildings are more than a half-century old. Many relate to dra-

matic events in the history of our country, particularly World War II. More than a thousand were designed by famous architects like Albert Kahn and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

They qualify, therefore, for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The Register is maintained by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. Federal law provides for listing of buildings and districts of “national, state, or local historical or architectural significance.” In a community with a number of significant buildings that relate to each other, a “National Register District” is usually designated rather than individual structures. All “contributing buildings” in the district are considered to be on the Register.

1996’s community history project on wartime Middle River was partly funded by the Maryland Historical Trust, the state agency that manages the National Register in Maryland. That study revealed that Middle River is eligible for listing in the Register in at least six different categories. The Maryland Historical Trust is prepared to go forward with a National Register nomination for Middle River— if they receive evidence of local support.

Why would residents want their neighborhood, perhaps even their own homes to be in the National Register of Historic Places? For some people, the honor of it would be reason enough. They could put a bronze plaque on their building stating that it is in the National Register. A number of companies sell a lot of these.

There are other reasons, however, including a variety of tax advantages. For years it has been possible to take state income-tax deductions

for rehabilitation work in historic districts. Still another advantage of a historic district might be called “change management.” Whenever federal funds are spent, federal historic districts is what saved Federal Hill and Fells Point from being demolished for an interstate highway.

But don’t historic districts also involve lots of intrusive controls? You may have heard about disputes over paint colors or vinyl siding. These sometimes arise in historical districts established by local laws, which usually do impose some controls over property-owners. But National Register historic districts offer mostly rewards, not controls. Owners of properties in N.R. districts are free to alter them, paint them whatever color they want, even to tear them down— as long as it doesn’t involve the taxpayers’ money.

But how could wartime Middle River houses be rehabbed in an “authentic” way? You certainly can’t buy “Cemesto” brand asbestos panels anymore! And most houses already have been altered pretty drastically from their original appearance. The solution involves carefully identifying the most basic elements of wartime Middle River design. The curving streets and cul-de-sacs are all still in place. Many of the houses still have low roof gables, paired or picture windows, small porches, and other original features. In other cases alterations have maintained basic appearance of original houses, while also testifying to the ingenuity of their owners.

No action will be taken towards “historic districting” without initiative by residents and property-owners. If you’re interested, contact your neighborhood association, civic council, or elected representative.

Acknowledgements

"Determine where you've been before you decide where you're going." Nowhere is the phrase more applicable than in the revitalization of older communities such as Essex and Middle River. And nothing is more important in knowing where you've been than in the recording of local history.

Whether gathered through stories passed down from family members or the research of professional historians, the preservation of a community's past relies mainly upon the written word. For 20 years, as an editor and journalist, I have been privileged to hear and share stories of "the good old days" of Essex and Middle River. Hundreds of citizens have opened their homes, hearts and trust to me in relaying events of the past. Their joy in reliving neighborhood history is as apparent as my own in hearing these tales for the first time.

For many years I waited for others to record our history. Just a few community-focused booklets grace our local library shelves and larger volumes simply skim the surface. I'm proud to say, I have played a part in producing four local history booklets, each published by a non-profit community group. This project, looking back at "Old Middle River," I embarked upon on my own.

The prospect of revitalizing Eastern Baltimore County sparked me to action — revitalization, after all, means new life, not wiping something out and starting over. Our proud older citizens want to save some of the past yet be part of a new plan.

Their pride, I found, was the key to success and survival on the Eastside. Their generation was never ashamed to say they were from Essex or Middle River. They bragged about it and their families' contributions to industry, development, education and the environment. Senior citizens are most proud, perhaps, of their place in the history and victory of World War II. Stories of the Glenn L. Martin Co. and the past glory of Bethlehem Steel roll from their tongues like sheet metal at the old plant.

Two years ago I set out to record their stories, to pass on this pride to new residents of Middle River and Essex, and to encourage those who have moved away to come back home — putting into practice what I believe is Community Conservation in its highest form.

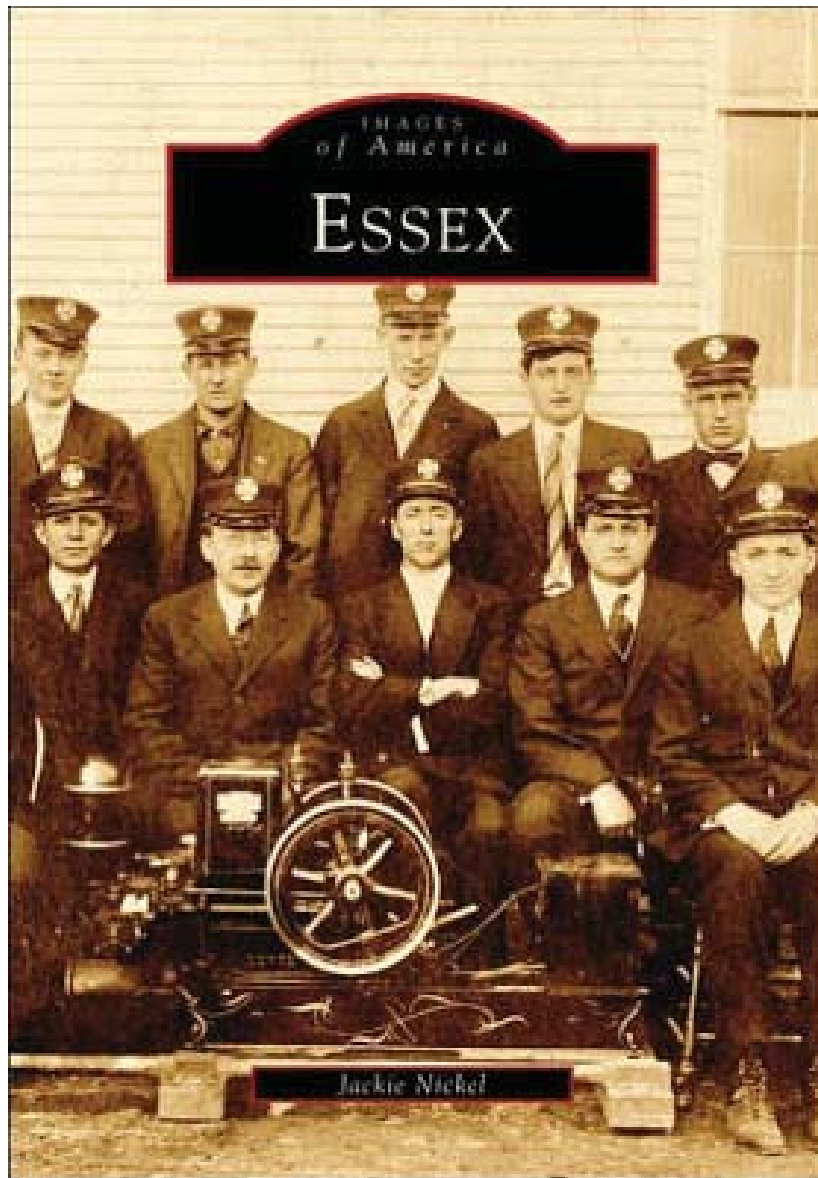
I gratefully acknowledge Chesapeake Publishing Co. and *The Avenue News*, especially Dave Palmer and Jean Flanagan, for their help and encouragement; the Baltimore County Office of Community Conservation for their assistance; WaterView/Mark Building Co., my first book purchaser; the Glenn L. Martin Aviation Museum and the Heritage Society of Essex and Middle River for material they provided; the civic and business community; all the folks who relayed stories and shared precious photos and memories; "Memories of Mars Estates" web site (<http://groups.msn.com/MemoriesofMarsEstates>) members, Prof. Jack Breihan, and of course, my family and friends who believe in me more strongly and frequently than I believe in myself.

— JN



Jackie Nickel (1942-2007) documented stories about her hometown of Essex as a community newspaper editor, reporter, and freelance writer for almost 30 years. A civic activist, officer, and board member of several community organizations, she forged a deep commitment to the town and a love for the people and places she wrote about. Nickel believed that the retelling of Essex's difficult past would serve to cement community pride and define its future.

Learn more at <http://nickelforyourmemories.com>.



[Images of America: Essex](#)

By Jackie Nickel

“Advertised in a 1909 sales brochure as “The Rising Suburb of the East,” Essex, Maryland, has seen its fate and fortune rise and fall and rise again. The town enjoyed its early reputation as a haven for city dwellers with picnic groves, hunting and fishing clubs, dance halls, and waterfront amusement parks. The boom continued with new jobs and prosperity until the 1950s, when a fire destroyed much of the town’s main street. Economic decay set in as a result of the loss of industry and an influx of low-income housing. Several attempts at redevelopment and legislation failed, resulting in the residents’ distrust of government intervention. Finally a county-backed Renaissance project was established in 2002, bringing Essex a new epithet: “The Hidden Gem of Baltimore County.”